

HER DAUGHTER JEAN



MARION AMES TAGGART



Class PZ7

Book T128 He

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

Her Daughter Jean

BOOKS BY
MARION AMES TAGGART

THE SIX GIRLS SERIES

SIX GIRLS AND BOB. A Story of Patty Pans
and Green Fields. 330 pages.

SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA ROOM. A Story.
316 pages.

SIX GIRLS GROWING OLDER. A Story.
331 pages.

SIX GIRLS AND THE SEVENTH ONE. A
Story. 358 pages.

BETTY GASTON, THE SEVENTH GIRL.
A Story. 352 pages.

SIX GIRLS AND BETTY. A Story. 320 pages.

SIX GIRLS GROWN UP. A Story. 343 pages.

Price, \$1.50 each

HER DAUGHTER JEAN. A Story. 336 pages.
\$1.20 net.

These volumes are attractively illustrated and
bound uniformly.



Her Daughter Jean

A STORY

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART

ILLUSTRATED BY

WILLIAM F. STECHER



W. A. WILDE COMPANY

BOSTON

CHICAGO

127
T128
H2

Copyrighted, 1913,
BY W. A. WILDE COMPANY
All rights reserved

HER DAUGHTER JEAN

13-26561

21

\$1.20

©Cl.A358747

This book is lovingly dedicated

to

CONSTANCE'S DAUGHTER JEAN

Whose life began on the day
finis was written to

“Her Daughter Jean”

April 4th, 1913

CONTENTS

I.	JEAN'S DREAMING	11
II.	JEAN'S AWAKENING	26
III.	JEAN IN THE FOG	43
IV.	JEAN, THE HOUSEKEEPER	58
V.	JEAN'S OPPORTUNITY	76
VI.	JEAN'S MISGIVINGS	91
VII.	JEAN'S PRESENT	108
VIII.	JEAN'S HOLIDAY	124
IX.	JEAN MAKES ANOTHER NEW ACQUAINT- ANCE	141
X.	JEAN'S VORTEX	158
XI.	JEAN'S FEARS TAKE FORM	173
XII.	JEAN'S PLOT	188
XIII.	JEAN, THE CONSPIRATOR	205
XIV.	JEAN'S CALL TO ARMS	220
XV.	JEAN'S BOLD PLUNGE	236
XVI.	JEAN'S COURAGE	251
XVII.	JEAN'S TRIUMPH	269
XVIII.	JEAN FACES SORROW	284
XIX.	JEAN'S REWARD	299
XX.	JEAN'S FREIGHTED SHIPS	317

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
JEAN STOOD SMILING, WAVING HER HAND <i>Frontispiece</i>	47 ✓
HELEN NODDED TOWARD THE WINDOW	15 ✓
SHE CUT THROUGH THE WATER WITH HER SAIL CLOSE HAULED	186 ✓
NO ONE CAME NEAR THE THREE WOMEN	297 ✓

Her Daughter Jean

CHAPTER I

JEAN'S DREAMING

"IT is perfectly beautiful!" cried Helen Lumley. She looked at Jean Wolcott with awe, seeing her as the author of a poem, not as her sixteen-year-old friend. Helen was one of those persons who regard poetry as something so thoroughly to be respected that it ought not to be read—or need not be! Surely it was never to be read for pleasure. And as to making it—well!

"I don't see how you can make up poetry," Helen continued.

Jean flushed with annoyance. It exasperated her to have Helen make one of these dull, kindly remarks, which she invariably did when Jean read one of her poems to her, a remark that betrayed admiration for the miracle of poetry writing, rather than for the poem. She folded the paper with a quick movement, and fell back among her pillows.

"It isn't strange if that is what a person is born to do. A singer sings, a painter paints, a poet writes poetry. Each one has a language in which to express his soul," explained Jean, somewhat importantly. Then, inconsistently, further to call out Helen's admiration, though it had annoyed her, Jean added: "I've just had a poem accepted by *Guernsey's Magazine*."

"Oh, truly!" cried Helen. "Did they pay for it? What did they say about it?"

"Oh, Helen!" protested Jean. "Yes, they paid for it, ten dollars, which they said was a little more than their usual rate of twenty-five cents a line. Isn't it awful to think that poetry is sold by measurement, like unbleached cloth!"

Helen laughed. "Unbleached cloth is always in demand," she observed, leaving the application of her remark to the poet. "But isn't it glorious, Jean! You are actually launched on your career, at sixteen!"

"As to that, I was launched long ago. You know I've had lots of poems published in papers, only they weren't the ones that pay. I suppose the money does put a kind of seal on its being good, but it is rather horrid. They were darling verses, though I suppose I couldn't say so to any one that didn't love me well enough to let me say what I think. They were child verses, the kind everybody is trying to write now, em-

bodying a child's thoughts in that sweet, little simple way that a grown person uses when he is writing about a child. I don't remember what Rod and Steve were like when they were little, but I can tell you Dorcas Wolcott isn't that sort of child one bit! There's nothing poetic or dreamy about Dorcas when she looks at racing waves, like the child I wrote about!"

"Dorcas would race the racing waves, not waste time imagining things about them," commented Helen.

Jean nodded, her smile fading into a look of melancholy. "Oh, Helen," she cried, "if only I were well, think what glorious things I could accomplish! Isn't it hard to be given a precious gift and then be denied the use of it?"

"It's dreadful, Jeannie," said Helen sympathetically. "And here am I as strong as can be and not a gift to be found in me with a search-light!"

"Oh, as to that, Nell, you are considered the most competent girl of our age in all the Tidewaters, North, East, or West, with the Centre thrown in! And when Tidewater calls a girl 'competent' it means more than when it calls her a Sappho," laughed Jean. "I imagine the Lumley family enjoy your gifts more than the Wolcotts do mine—though my blessed mother is so proud of me I am quite ashamed."

"We are all proud of you, Jean, and we all wish you

were strong," said Helen gently. She hesitated, looking at her friend so earnestly that Jean said :

"What is back of that wish, Helen? You look volumes you aren't publishing."

"I don't dare!" said Helen. "But, after all—you won't misunderstand? You won't think that I'm not so sorry for your being half an invalid that I don't know what to do, will you, Jean dear? You know if I had heard of anything that would make you better I ought to tell you? Then," she went on, flushed, but brave, as Jean nodded, "there are people in Tidewater who love you dearly and who think—maybe—you would be strong, or far stronger—if you spent part of your day in—well, in active work. If you did not write and dream all the time. Now, Jean, please don't be angry! You know I don't say they're right! And they are just as loving to you as they can be who say it."

"Do you suppose my Step-grand, Claudia Wolcott, ever loses a chance to impress upon mother and me how wrong we both are, I to lie here nearly all the time, and she to let me?" demanded Jean angrily. "Why, Helen, what do you suppose Tidewater people know about a poet? Poets often are frail, just as I am; it's the penalty of their temperament. Do you suppose I don't want to be strong and run about and enjoy my youth with the other girls?"



HELEN NODDED TOWARDS THE WINDOW

“To tell the truth, Jean, I don’t think you care much about that,” said Helen with a little laugh. “I’m the only girl you really like—you dear thing!—though I don’t see why, for I’m not as clever as lots of the other Tidewater girls. I don’t think you care much to go about with the girls, but I do think you must long to be free and strong, to go hours and hours each day into all that!” Helen nodded toward the window.

It was a casement window that opened outward. It was curtained in soft white muslin that fluttered in the breeze of this warm day of early May. Through it the girls saw the ocean, blue and still, stretching off to meet a sky as blue, but brighter. The heat wavered between their eyes and the water, and the sunshine made the nearer surface of the sea dance, while a line of white occasionally marked a wave that broke far off from shore. Jean’s chamber window did not show them the white beach below the dune, but the girls saw the lighthouse straight out in a line from the window, and they knew that the white mist rising at its foot into the sunshine was the foam of the breakers on the rocks which the lighthouse crowned. It was all so beautiful that for a moment Jean did not answer, and when she did it was not directly to the point of Helen’s last remark.

“It isn’t strange that I write poetry, lying here

looking at that day after day, in storm and sunshine. And the sea wind beats against this casement and drives the spray into my room in northeasters. And at the full of the moon she rises just to the right of the light, straight up out of that ocean, all for me, Helen, all for me who cannot go out into the beauty, like you girls, but who loves it as no one else can," murmured Jean, with the lost look in her eyes that told Helen that one of her uplifted moods was upon her and that further suggestions of a practical nature would be wasted.

"Do you think that you are going to be here just as you are now, all your days? Not ill—you never are really ill, Jean!—but just delicate and lying here nearly all the time?" Helen asked after a pause. "There isn't anything the matter with you, except that you aren't strong. When do you suppose you will get strong? Ever, Jean?"

Jean flushed and turned her dreamy eyes from the sea to her friend. "Helen, the reason I like you as I never could like any other girl in Tidewater is that I can say anything to you and you will surely understand, although you are so practical, so different from me," she said. "What I'm going to tell you would sound silly unless you did understand, but I know you will. I feel in myself a great strength that seems to be

'way down below in my soul. I feel as if I could do almost anything, bear almost anything. I think I could do wonders if a sort of miracle were wrought in me. As it is I tire so easily that I can hardly bear anything. But I think some day the miracle will happen. I think love will work it, just as it did for Mrs. Browning. Of course it is a long way off, but we are sixteen, and that is quite old enough to think of what is coming some day. Mrs. Browning was a poet. I believe that, just like her, I could get up off a bed of suffering, cured, and work and bear and suffer for any one I loved."

Helen looked at Jean's kindling eyes and felt no temptation to smile. Jean was beautiful at times. Just now she looked like a Jeanne d'Arc, enkindled, her gray eyes dilated, her pale cheeks flushed, her sensitive mouth set firm and sweet as it smiled a welcome to future trials and heroisms to be gone through by the girl for a great love.

"Oh, Jean, dear Jean, you may be right. I guess we others can't judge for you. But I know if either love or duty called you, you would be strong to do what came to you to be done," said Helen, rising to go.

Jean arose with her. She was taller by half a head than Helen, tall and slender, whereas the other girl was short and compact. Jean wound her arm around Helen

and went with her into the hall. From below came up the sound of voices. Mrs. Wolcott, standing within the parlor door, was also saying last words to a friend who was taking leave.

The girls had no interest in what was going on below, but the voice of the departing caller smote their ears and they were instantly aroused to an interest in what she was saying, as absorbing as it was unforeseen, and which swept them beyond consciousness of being listeners.

“Well, there’s no use in talking to you, Mary ! Jean has always been the apple of your eye and you’ll spare her just as long as you can, whatever any one says. But I tell you it’s a crime, a crime to yourself, to the other children, to Jean, not to tell her.” The woman’s voice mounted higher in her earnestness.

“Oh, hush ! Don’t speak so loud ; she and Helen might hear,” cried Mrs. Wolcott in distress. “How can I tell Jean ? The child is so frail that I’m always worried about her, and if I went away all the burden of this household would fall on her unaccustomed shoulders. You know what Bentley is—absolutely lost to the world in his dreams and his patents up there in the tower room. Jean would have more than she could endure ; it would kill her. I must risk staying here. The doctor may be wrong, but if not—better I than she !”

“Mary Wolcott, you are enough to try the patience of all the angels in heaven!” the visitor burst out with vehement impatience. “Hasn’t the doctor—not only our doctor, but the specialist in Boston—haven’t they both said that if you went away in time you would certainly be cured? And haven’t they agreed that you must die, absolutely *must* die if you stayed here beside the sea, simply cultivating your tendency in this strong, rough, damp air? Now answer me!”

“Oh, Rhoda, don’t, I beg of you!” implored Mrs. Wolcott’s soft, distressed voice, and Jean, clutching Helen in wide-eyed terror, noticed for the first conscious time that a cough interrupted its sweetness.

“Why do you distress me like this? You know I have been told all that, but you know, too, that I cannot go away to that mountain sanitorium, leaving my poor little Jean to struggle on alone. We cannot afford a servant. You know all about our affairs, Rhoda, and why I cannot save myself at the cost of poor little Jean. I must bear what comes.”

“Mary,” said Mrs. Wolcott’s cousin more gently, “you are unjust to Jean. Isn’t it better she should struggle now than to lose you? Do you think the girl would hesitate if you gave her her choice? We all think that Jean would be perfectly well if she had an absorbing interest, some active employment; she needs

arousing. But whether or not we are right as to that, unless you think Jean heartless, you are preparing her a heartbreak by insisting on staying here and dying to spare her temporary hardship. Your kindness is cruelty. When Jean finds out, too late—and she is sure to find it out—that you stayed here to spare her, you will have left her a legacy of grief sharper than the mere loss of her mother, the grief of having been blind when sight might have given you life. If you don't tell her I will. And don't the boys and that madcap Dorcas need you? Is Jean the only one to consider? And that Bentley Wolcott of yours, who is about as fit to live without you as a suspension bridge is to hang without its towers!"

Mrs. Wolcott and her cousin moved toward the door, Mrs. Wolcott imploring her cousin not to speak to Jean, at least until she had time to reconsider telling her the truth herself. The two girls shrank back out of sight. Then Jean pulled Helen into her own room again, shut the door and sat down upon the foot of her couch, staring, speechless, at Helen with frightened, dilated eyes.

"Maybe it isn't so," murmured Helen.

"Of course it's so," said Jean slowly, in a voice so hard and unlike her own that Helen was more frightened than before. "Mother has been ailing for a

long, long time. Everybody speaks of her as not strong; people ask me about her pityingly, I do believe, though I never thought of it before. I thought she was tired out, but I've been taking it for granted that mother was naturally always tired, just as I took everything else about her for granted. It never occurred to me to help her," Jean went on, monotonously, self-accusingly. "She went up to Boston two weeks ago. I have thought she seemed troubled since then, but I thought it far off in the back of my dreaming, worthless brain; it didn't strike me as anything real, that I ought to feel instead of see. Mother is often troubled; I suppose I am used to that, too, and thought it was enough for me to live; that ought to be comfort enough for her! I—I—wrote poetry! Mother has always been anxious. You know that father is so far-off, so impractical, that mother has to do it all—— Oh, my mother! My dear, brave, uncomplaining mother!"

Jean's dull, wretched voice, charged only with self-contempt, broke, and she shook with sobs that brought no tears. Helen essayed to put her arms about her, but Jean thrust them away.

"She has been father and mother both," Jean went on, forcing back the sobs. "She has borne everything that there was to bear, and I, I have lived sixteen

years and have never taken my share ! I see it all at once ; it kills me to see ! ” She clutched her throat with a gasp that strangled her. “ Helen, do you suppose that God will count it as a tiny excuse that I never once, not once was awake before ? I wrote my miserable verses, and dreamed, and took for granted my life in this house just as it had always been, just as I had lived when I was six instead of sixteen, no earthly use ! Dorcas is a trial and she is only ten, but I believe she helps mother more than I do ! And now—you heard ! Mother is ill, mother will die, die, *die*, Helen, unless she goes away ! Oh, I can’t bear it ! ” Jean pressed her hands over her dry, burning eyes, then suddenly threw them out as if she would fling away the worthless hands, and the threatened sorrow with them. The color swept to her hair and her eyes glowed with the fire of a great resolution as she sprang to her feet, looking taller than ever, drawing herself to her full height.

“ I don’t have to bear it ! ” she cried. “ If she goes away she will not die ! She shall go—Monday ! I will drive her away. Oh, Cousin Rhoda was right ! How could mother be so cruel as to risk letting such a sorrow fall on us ? My mother—dead ! But she is going away, Helen, and I shall take her place. You will teach me how. You said you had no gifts, but I don’t know how to cook ; I’m not fit to be left alone in

my own home! Oh, what a worthless, worthless girl! And we thought I was wonderful. Poetry! *Poetry*, Helen, when my mother was breaking down and I let her! But it isn't too late. Oh, thank heaven, it isn't too late! She said if she went away it would save her. Didn't she, Helen? You heard that, and Cousin Rhoda said so, too."

"Yes, yes. Don't, Jean, dear, don't get so excited! You must be quiet and steady, or you can't do what is to be done. Just be glad that you found out in time and then go quietly about saving your mother—and then we know that you will save her," said Helen, gathering Jean like a baby into her arms, which Jean no longer resisted.

"You dear, sensible, anchor Helen!" sobbed Jean, now crying tempestuously, but relievingly, steadying herself on the sturdy young shoulder that lovingly offered itself to her quivering body. "I will be good. You must let me cry a while. I don't often go to pieces, but it was such a shock, such a shock, Helen!"

"I know, I do know! I'm shocked, too. There, there, dear! Don't cry so hard; it will use you up so dreadfully. You must keep yourself well, Jeannie. I hope you are going to be able to carry it through," murmured Helen anxiously as she patted Jean's burning cheek.

Jean straightened herself with one of her sudden changes and a luminous smile that was more wonderful than a poem, had she but known it.

“Why, I said some day love would come and cure me and make me equal to what was required of me!” she cried. “I didn’t mean this sort of love; I meant romance. All girls mean that when they talk of love. But this love is just as strong, stronger— isn’t it? I think I love my mother well enough to live—or to die—for her! It has come, this very hour, Helen! The thing that love wants me to wake up to and do for it. Now you shall see that it’s going to make me perfectly strong and well to work for love’s sake. It’s going to be a miracle worked by love. Dearest, poor, poor little mother! Keeping it all to herself to spare her good-for-nothing oldest child! Helen, come with me. We’ve got to find her and tell her that I know, that I heard every word Cousin Rhoda said to her, and that her worthless Jean is going to try to be a woman. I’ll tell her that love shall cure us both, that I am cured already. Helen, I feel as if I were walking on that ocean with God’s hands under my arms, right up to victory. Don’t you see no one could fail that way? Mother will be cured; she shall not die. She’s coughing just to wake me; it’s a trumpet cough! Oh, Helen, if I hadn’t found out!

Come, Nell, come ! I am going out of this room of mine right into my own home and my place in it. If only it isn't too late ! ”

Jean walked out of the door, head erect, her face aflame with such passionate self-reproach, love, courage, determination that she looked like a maiden of centuries ago, walking into the coliseum to face the lions, strong in a faith to conquer death. Helen followed her, white and frightened. Jean was very beautiful thus, but she seemed to the less highly wrought girl like something unearthly and rather alarming. Practical and devoted to her gifted Jean, Helen trembled at this swift rising from dreams and semi-invalidism. With all her warm heart she pitied Jean, and not less she feared for her.

CHAPTER II

JEAN'S AWAKENING

AT the sitting-room door Helen paused. "I won't go in with you, dear," she said. "I'll go home now. Your mother must be in there."

Jean scarcely heard her, though she mechanically returned Helen's kiss and hand pressure. Already, as she closed the door behind her friend, she was on the other side of the sitting-room door with her mother in her arms.

When Jean entered Mrs. Wolcott looked up, throwing off with a conscious effort the expression of utter wretchedness that she had allowed her face to wear as she sat alone, looking at the situation without disguise. Instantly, with a mother's loving hypocrisy, she assumed her usual cheerful smile. But when she saw Jean's face she knew that it was no longer necessary to act a part.

"Mother!" was all Jean said, but Mrs. Wolcott knew that Jean had found her out.

She held out her arms and the girl ran into them,

clutching her mother, who held her tight, with one great sob that tore itself out of her overcharged heart. That was the only expression of grief that escaped her. Instead, Jean began at once to talk. Her voice was high and strained, she trembled, but there were no tears, no weakness.

“Mother, Helen and I came out into the hall just as Cousin Rhoda was going; we heard. How could you, mother dearest, dearest, cruelest, how could you!” she said.

Mrs. Wolcott did not speak, and Jean went on:

“Of course it doesn’t excuse me for not seeing, but it was frightful that you did not tell me. Suppose I hadn’t found out! I’m pretty poor material. I’m selfish, dreaming, indolent, anything, but I do love you! If you’d told me I’d have ’roused, just as I’ve waked up now. And to think if I’d gone on so wickedly blind! Oh, Cousin Rhoda was right! It would have killed me with remorse.”

“Jean, my darling, my dearest child, I won’t let you abuse yourself, nor feel thus toward yourself!” cried Jean’s mother. “It would not have been natural for you to see, and I hoped it might not be as bad as they said. You are always my sweet, loving child, not strong, lost in your dear little brain, but always my comfort, my pride. You must never reproach yourself,

whatever happens. Remember, darling, you are all I could ask you to be."

Jean swept away her mother's consolation with a gesture. "It doesn't matter what you say, mother, I know!" she said. "I'm too old to live like a genius boarding in this house. I'm horrid, but it's something to know it. Never mind about me; I've got my own picture by a flashlight, through hearing you and Cousin Rhoda talking. Now, that's settled. Here's another thing that's settled. You're going away on Monday."

"Jean ——" began Mrs. Wolcott, but Jean swept away her attempt to speak with another swift, imperious gesture, and went on herself.

"I know every single word you'll say," she cried. "Every one. 'You can't leave me;' 'I'm not strong enough'—you won't say I don't know enough, though that's nearer true—'to take care of the family.' 'You can't leave the boys,' 'you can't leave Dorcas,' 'you can't leave father,' 'you must get some clothes ready,' 'you must see that some dozens of things are done to the house,' 'you have got to cook up a lot to leave for us'—I know all about that! *But you are going on Monday!*" Jean's voice, Jean's eyes, Jean's swift moving hands underscored her final statement.

"You have not thought of the cost, my dear," said her mother with a faint smile.

“Of course I have! Even a moonstruck thing like me knows it’s the thing we have to think of almost first,” retorted Jean. “But it will not cost a cent less two weeks from now than on Monday. I know you’ve got money put away for a rainy day; you always have provided for that rainy day. This is worse than rain; it’s a blizzard! Mother, don’t waste one moment hunting up objections, for there isn’t one on earth big enough to stop your going. If we hadn’t the money I’d go to Step-grand and beg, or steal it—and I can’t say anything stronger than that I’d go to her for money! And if you tried to stay here, risking your life, I’d get Dr. Blaisdell to chloroform you and take you away before you came to! Mother, oh, mother, can’t you stop being unselfish in your way for a minute and try to think what it would cost us—me especially!—if you didn’t go? Can’t you see that it drives me nearly mad even to think of what may happen if you wait to go? How can you risk dying? With four children? And you the dearest, the greatest thing in the world to us? Mother, don’t be afraid to leave me. I’ll blunder badly enough, but Helen will help me and Steve is a regular Plymouth Rock of a dependence-boy. All the neighbors will advise me and help me out, and after a week or so I’ll know lots. Don’t be afraid I’ll write poetry on the dishes, instead of washing them, or make up a story

instead of the beds ! Don't you see, can't you feel that already I'm changed ? You are going Monday. I'm going to tell father in a minute. Come right up-stairs now, and we'll see what you'll have to take for clothes, and what you have to buy new. This is Wednesday—Thursday, Friday, Saturday—five days ! That's heaps and oceans of time. You can stop over in Boston and get whatever you need. Come up-stairs and we'll get out everything you own. Come, my blessed mother ! ”

Jean's arm around her mother's drooping body pulled her to her feet ; Jean triumphantly felt her mother's mind and will yielding to hers, just as her body yielded to her arms.

“ Oh, Jean ! ” she protested feebly.

Jean suddenly poured hot tears and kisses on her pale face, crying with all her might as she crushed her mother in an embrace that showed little weakness.

“ Mother, mother, mother ! Oh, my mother, mother, mother ! ” she sobbed. Then she sternly checked the outburst that had not mastered her until she knew that her cause was won.

“ I wouldn't—I wouldn't be guilty of being so cruel to my eldest child as you are, my unselfish, dear, silent blessing, not for the mint ! Not even if she were no kind of use, for I'd have known I'd have killed her if I'd have let myself die to spare her a little housework ! ”

Jean gasped chokingly, trying to laugh as she saw that her tempest of tears had broken up her mother's self-control.

Up-stairs in her mother's room, which looked on the sea just as Jean's across the hall looked on it, Jean rapidly emptied cupboard and bureau drawers till the bed and all the chairs, except the one into which she had peremptorily pushed her mother, the big chintz-covered armchair by the window, were covered with clothing. These Jean rapidly assorted, holding up one article after another before her mother, deciding in most cases herself, with extreme speed, as if she feared that Monday would jump upon them out of due course and surprise them, unready.

"You won't have to take so very, very much," said Jean, speaking with difficulty as she held a dressing jacket lightly in her teeth, while she compared two others, held at arm's length. "For one thing you may get strong fast and come home soon, and for another you can send for what you need. This one is faded, motherkins; you must take these two." She tossed two of the jackets on the pile that was to go and folded the third to return to the drawer.

"I don't like your wrapper. You are to get a new one in Boston; two: one warm one and one thinner one. Now that's about all; we've looked them all

over. You see how easy it will be to get ready? I've got a list here of what you must buy." Jean glanced at a pad on which she had made swift notes of what she considered must be replaced in her mother's simple wardrobe. "This afternoon," she continued, "I'm going to kidnap Miss Lizzie; tell her wherever she's sewing she must leave and come here to put in order your two dresses that have to be altered, because you are going away Monday and they must be in the trunk Saturday night. I'll order a trunk at the same time. Nobody in this family has used one for so long that there isn't one good enough to take away. Mercy, mother! Where are you going? I never thought of that till this moment!"

Mrs. Wolcott laughed. "The doctors wanted me to go to the Summit Sanitorium, on Mount Horsford. I suppose I am going there, since you have decided it."

"That isn't so dreadfully far away; it might have been Colorado," said Jean, regarding her mother critically. "You look pale. This dress parade has tired you. I think I'll beat up a raw egg for you."

"I couldn't take it, dearie," said Mrs. Wolcott.

"I've heard somewhere that if you beat one light, and add a half glass of cold water, instead of milk, they're more delicate; I'm going to try it that way," announced Jean, already on her way out of the room.

She surprised herself, no less than her mother, by producing this knowledge which had lain dormant in her brain till needed, and till her mother's danger aroused the side of her mind wherein practical knowledge slumbered.

Jean beat the egg into feathery lightness, added the sugar and water and carried it, with three thin biscuits to her mother, who, to her profound satisfaction, drank it with relish and ate the biscuits, as well.

"Thank you, daughter Jean," she said, giving back the little tray to Jean. "If I'm to have a poet and a nurse and a deft housekeeper, all combined in my one dear daughter, how do you suppose I shall ever live up to my blessings?"

"Just by living—up or down," said Jean, going away quickly to hide the tears this praise called forth.

Having deposited her burden in the big, old-fashioned kitchen Jean hastened away to find her father in "the tower room," as Mr. Wolcott's workshop and special sanctum was called. The Wolcott house was an old one, dating back to Revolutionary days, when houses were built of hand-hewn timber, with rooms big enough to hold the massive furniture of those times. It had been "the Wolcott house," never passing out of the family, since it was built. It stood on the brow of the cliff which ran along parallel with the

sea through Tidewater. From the cliff dunes descended at this point of the town to the ocean. Below the house lay the glittering expanse of the Atlantic, breaking, with happy songs to itself, or in towering rages on the rocks at the foot of the old house. In the center of the Wolcott house, a Wolcott of two generations before had built a tower which, though not proper to the original plan, was still not incongruous to the solid house with its square dimensions, straight lines and perfect proportions. In this tower Mr. Bentley Wolcott, the present owner of the house of his fathers, had established himself. Here he spent his days, innocently enough, but most ineffectually, inventing, improving, dreaming, reading, still seeing the visions of youth, still holding to youth's vague belief in something great that was to come of an inaction that never has produced results, nor ever can produce them, for genius itself does not exempt a man from the law that compels each one to labor for a prize. Jean's father looked up and greeted her with a smile, absent-minded, but sweet and kindly. His eyes were blue, with much the look in them that babies wear when they are comfortably fed and are getting—not sleepy, but ready to be sleepy. Mr. Wolcott cleared a chair of its magazines with a gesture inviting the girl to be seated, but Jean shook her head.

"I want to go back to catch Rod and Steve when they come in," she said. "Father, dear, did you know that mother was not well?"

Her father looked alarmed, and half started to his feet. "I thought yesterday—or was it the day before?—that your mother looked somewhat pale. Is she taken with pain? Do you think it is a cold, Jean?" he asked.

"Oh, father dear, no; I don't mean that she is suddenly, not specially ill to-day," said Jean. Her father sank back, instantly reassured. "It is worse than that," Jean continued, trying not to lose patience as she saw that he was so ready for reassurance. "She is dangerously broken down; the doctors think her lungs may be affected. She has seen a specialist in Boston who agrees with Dr. Blaisdell. They say that she will not get well unless she goes away from here."

"My dear Jean, Tidewater is especially wholesome," said Mr. Wolcott, looking distressed, yet with an effect of the distress being caused almost as much by this imputation on Tidewater as by Jean's serious information. "Your dear mother! I hardly think they can be right, however. What does she purpose doing, my dear?"

"She is going away on Monday," said Jean.

"On Monday? Not for long?" exclaimed Mr. Wolcott, looking really alarmed now.

"Until she is well enough to come back," said Jean. "I am going to keep house for you. I don't wonder you look frightened! Oh, father, dear daddy," Jean added piteously, abandoning her attempt at lightness, feeling keenly how slight a dependence in an emergency this sweet-natured dreamer would be, "try to put up with me, and please help me! I shall not do particularly well at first, but I'll learn. We—we must pull together to hold mother fast, mustn't we?"

"Surely, child, surely," said Mr. Wolcott, rising to put an arm around Jean with much affectionate gentleness. "You must not worry. I am certain that the doctors exaggerate; doctors are often alarmists. I never noticed anything seriously wrong with your mother. She never was strong, in a sense, yet she has never been ill, never given up like other women. She has a great deal of nervous strength, resolution, 'grit,' our New Englanders justly call it. Don't worry, my dear. As to your keeping house, I am certain our clever Jean can do that perfectly well. I will help you. I shall get an idea I'm working on now off my mind in a few days, then I shall have more leisure. You have shocked me, but on second thought I see there is no ground for anxiety. Still Mary does right

to go away. A little rest of a week or so will do her worlds of good. She might go to pay a visit to my cousin Winifred Adams ; we have often spoken of it. I'll go down and talk to your mother shortly. I'll just work a little longer on a point that somewhat baffles me. I'll be down shortly. I'm glad you came up to me with your trouble, little girl, but I assure you there isn't the least reason for worrying. So don't worry, my pretty Jean."

Mr. Wolcott dismissed Jean with several more reassuring pats and a kiss on her pale cheek ; plainly he regarded the case as good as cured by his quiet optimism. Jean went away with conflicting emotions. No one could help loving this gentle dreamer, yet people we love are sometimes trying. How little he realized the meaning of the statement that had chilled Jean's heart at its first hearing and then had roused it into the lion heart that fights for the creature it loves !

"Well, it's easy to see there must not be a second dreamer in this family !" she said aloud, as the result of her thoughts, descending the tower stairs. She barely escaped stepping on William Penn, the gray cat, who slept by choice on the tower stairs and never exerted himself to rise when any one used them, considering it was their affair, not his, to get out of the way. He

jumped to his feet now, looking reproachfully at Jean, as if he thought this was no way for her to begin abandoning her dreaming. As she came into the dining-room Jean encountered her two brothers, who had chanced to enter the house together. Rodney, the elder, was fifteen months younger than Jean, a handsome, brilliantly-colored lad of fifteen, quick, confident, gifted with charm and grace. Stephen, the younger, was not yet thirteen. He lacked Rod's beauty, and the qualities that later would develop into social graces. But there was that in his face that made it quite as attractive as Rod's, to some people more so. There was a steady light in his brown eyes that spoke of sterling qualities, and these Steve had. He was honest, truthful, kind, loyal, not brilliant, but gifted with sound sense. He was, as Jean had said, "a regular Plymouth Rock of dependence," young as he was.

The two boys took the news which Jean poured out to them in characteristic manner. Rod flushed, his lips quivered, tears sprang to his eyes of which he was man enough not to be ashamed. "I couldn't bear it if she didn't get well!" Rod murmured, and bolted.

Steve turned white and said not a word. He went over to Jean and put his arms around her after Rod had gone. Still without speaking he patted her back, holding her fast. And somehow, comfort and

courage flowed into Jean from the silent little boy, and for the first time she felt that she would not be alone in bearing the hard days which lay before her while her mother was absent, not alone even if her mother did not return.

She kissed Steve with all her might, but neither in her turn did she speak. Thus Jean and Steve signed their compact to do the best they could for each other and for their family, which meant for their mother, and together they went up to her room.

Dorcas, the youngest of the Wolcotts, had come in while Jean was in the tower room. She was sitting on the floor, tailor-fashion, her favorite position, and talking as she always talked, "fifteen to the dozen," Rod said. She was a dark-haired, dark-eyed little creature of ten, not in the least like any of the others. Every motion she made was rapid and she made motions constantly. She seemed compounded of quicksilver and dynamite and afterward electrified. Nothing more inappropriate than her sober name could have been given her, but Dorcas was a name handed down in the Wolcott family and her father had been desirous to perpetuate it.

The look in Jean's face and Steve's as they entered made even Dorcas stop short in her rapid fire of chatter to her mother.

"Penny dead?" she demanded—she was devoted to William Penn and her mixed-up colored kitten, suitably called Funny.

"No indeed!" said Jean.

Mrs. Wolcott saw that it was incumbent upon her to make Steve feel less tragic than he looked. She smiled cheerfully and put out her hand to Dorcas.

"I was going to tell you, littlest girl," she said. "I am going away for a while, perhaps for several weeks—we can't tell for how long. Jean is to take care of you and the boys."

"Well, goodness knows, I'd be sorry for us if she did!" cried Dorcas. "Mamma, what are you going away for like that? Where are you going? You can't go without me; I've got to go where you do! Oh, my sakes, mamma, what *are* you going away for?"

"Dorcas, my dear, the doctors think I may be quite dangerously ill if I do not go. I was hesitating what to do and trying to think I could stay here, when dear, brave Jean found it all out and has decided that I am to go Monday. You must help Jean in every way you can. And you must be willing that I should go, as Jean is, for they tell me that unless I go away from the sea for a long stay I may go away all together—on the long journey," Mrs. Wolcott explained.

"Die?" cried Dorcas horrified. Then, reading in Jean's face that she had understood her mother aright, she scrambled to her feet with a cry and flung herself headlong into her mother's lap, in a passion of tears.

"Oh, go, go, go! Go quick! What makes you wait till Monday? There's a train to-night," she sobbed. "Oh, my sakes! Mamma, hurry up and go. I won't care if Jean is no good: I'll eat what she makes, if it's fearfuller than it will be. Only why can't I go with you? Why can't I? Sea is bad for me, too, when you're not at it."

"Dorcas, don't cry so!" murmured Mrs. Wolcott distressed, yet knowing that Dorcas would spend herself in this wild sobbing and be ready to see some advantage in her mother's going in an hour or so.

She looked at Steve and saw how miserable he was, so silent, so ready to put his grief out of sight.

"My dear lad, you are the one I count on most to sustain Jean and keep everything right till I get back," she said, knowing that this, which was true, would be the most comforting thing that she could say to Stephen.

"We'll be all right, mother; we'll get on. What you don't want to do is worry about us, that's all," said Steve, flushing painfully in his effort to hold back tears as he put his square brown hand in the thin one his mother held out to him.

“And you will be perfectly good, and obedient to Jean, and helpful to her till I come home, won’t you, little Dorcas?” Mrs. Wolcott added to her youngest, who was crying less tempestuously.

“I don’t know; it’s ’cording to how long you stay,” said Dorcas chokingly. “I never am good too long, you know.”

They all laughed; it was impossible to help it, and Dorcas brightened amazingly at having brought this about. There was one good feature about Dorcas’ somewhat wearing traits, no one was able to keep sad or dull long where she was.

CHAPTER III

JEAN IN THE FOG

JEAN carried out her programme. She did not actually kidnap Miss Lizzie Babcock, who was dressmaker-in-chief to all the Tidewaters, East Tidewater, West Tidewater, Tidewater Centre and Tidewater proper, the original settlement, but she did convince the brisk little dressmaker that her mother's necessities were sufficiently urgent to make her get her other engagements cancelled. When her customers learned from Miss Lizzie that Mrs. Wolcott was to be hurriedly made ready to go away to preserve her life they were all willing to release Miss Lizzie, for the Wolcotts, though far from rich, ranked first among Tidewater aristocrats; as lineal Tidewater residents, descended from colonial settlers, they were much "looked up to." Mrs. Wolcott was beloved for herself, and she was also greatly respected and somewhat pitied on the sly, for Bentley Wolcott's way of dreaming and accomplishing nothing for his family's comfort was a trait strongly in opposition to the Tidewater standards of keen energy.

Miss Lizzie came and sewed frantically. Mrs. Wol-

cott's Cousin Rhoda, Mrs. Towne, came to help, so did Helen Lumley's mother and practical Helen herself, and Mr. Wolcott's stepmother, Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, whom the children called "Step-grand," abbreviating step-grandmother, came also ; it was really like the sewing society Rod called it. The result of this activity was that on Saturday night Mrs. Wolcott's new trunk stood in the hall packed to the brim, its lid not closed, nor quite all the small last things in its upper tray compartments, but lacking only this to be ready to be borne out and to the station.

Sunday intervened, a strange day with its sense of the whole world at rest combined with unrestful minds in the Wolcott household, and with its afternoon and evening interrupted by many friends and acquaintances dropping in to bid Mrs. Wolcott good-bye and to wish her Godspeed.

Jean slumbered fitfully that night, falling into a light sleep to waken with a start, first to wonder, then to remember with a pang what was to happen. Before dawn she slipped out of her own bed and stole softly into her mother's room. Dorcas had begged and been allowed the baby's privilege of sleeping with her mother that last night ; she lay asleep curled close to her mother's side. Mrs. Wolcott was awake ; she held out a hand to invite Jean to her, and the big girl crept to

her, as much a child at heart as the younger one who had been their mother's baby more recently. Without speaking, lest they waken Dorcas, mother and daughter waited for the dawn, the mother stroking Jean's soft hair, the girl fondling the thin hand that had so unselfishly labored for her all her sixteen years of life.

The dawn was long coming ; the tall old clock below stairs struck six without its evidence. The day had begun, early rising was necessary, for Mrs. Wolcott was to take a morning train, and, somehow, it is always difficult to rise in time to get last things done in time to take a train that leaves at any hour before noon.

"Time to get up, little Mistress Housekeeper!" whispered Jean's mother in her ear.

Jean turned and kissed her mother, a long, clinging kiss, with her arms around the slender shoulders. Dorcas stirred and muttered. Jean released her mother and stole away as softly as she had come, having bade her the real farewell in that moment. Jean dressed and went down-stairs before any others of the family appeared.

The tardy daybreak was explained. A fog was drifting swiftly inland. It came driven before a hard northeast wind which blew chill against Jean's face, setting it tingling as she opened the door to look out. It dampened her hair and hung like a veil of mist on

her lashes, but, though it clouded her outward vision, it helped her inwardly to see clearly that it was best that her precious mother was going up to the mountains that day, away from the sea fog that might harm her, though to Jean it was as refreshing as a tonic.

Jean turned and went into the house. She was beginning her service already by preparing breakfast. She was ashamed and irritated to find herself so awkward at the simplest tasks. She set her teeth and attacked them with such energy that she defeated her own ends, for deft touches and patience succeed better than assaults on contrary moods of utensils and materials.

The morning thus passed busily in the hurried confusion of getting a traveler off, which leaves little room for emotion to get to the surface, but is the more wearing on nerves.

At last came the hour of departure, the moment for good-bye. Mrs. Wolcott's cousin was going with her. Mr. Wolcott was taking them to the station, driving Old King Cole, the black horse who had been one of the Wolcotts as long as Jean could remember. Dorcas insisted on seeing her mother off, so there was hardly room for Jean in any case, but she preferred to say good-bye to her mother at home, knowing what she should do when she had said it and she was alone.

Both boys had walked to the station. For a last hurried, but charged moment Mrs. Wolcott clung to Jean, overwhelmed with an influx of all her fears in leaving the delicate, inexperienced girl, whom she had always shielded, to face her new burdens and responsibilities.

It was Jean now who was the courageous one. She managed to smile at her mother and to bid her good-bye with a steady voice in a cheerful key, and she stood steadily smiling as they drove away, waving her hand till the fog shut the carriage from sight.

Jean stood alone on the fog-shrouded steps, she did not know how long. The taste of the brine was on her lips, the bitterness of loneliness in her heart and a great fear clutched her, now that there was nothing to help her fight it off, as to how this dear mother would return. She dreaded to go back into the silent house. Besides all this, and in spite of the minute instructions with which her mother had filled the past five days since it had been decided that she was to go away, a wave of helplessness swept over Jean, wiping out her courage as the long easterly sea swell rolling against the beach below her was wiping every mark from the sand.

The time had come for a good cry and, leaning her head against the kindly old house that had mothered so many Wolcotts, Jean gave herself up to having it with all the abandon that the repression of the past days in-

sured. The sense of utter desolation was new to the girl who had been enveloped in her mother's love and sheltered from pain all her short life. The knowledge that this mother had gone, gone because she was ill, overwhelmed her. She felt that she had lost her bearings, her ship itself, in the fog and she could not see ahead.

But after a wholesome time of having it all out with herself Jean sobbed less violently ; she began to try to see light and succeeded. After all how good it was that the beloved mother had gone away from this fog and chilling wind ! How blessed it was that it had been Jean herself who had sent her ! Her courage rose as she summoned it. She would not fail her mother, she would fight for her by making her absence possible until she could come back cured. Jean resolved to keep to the last letter the pledges which she had made to her mother and to herself.

“ It's like being knighted and sent out to battle with a dragon. It's the accolade of courage. The Accolade of Courage ! Wouldn't that make a fine title for a poem ! ” thought Jean, thus proving herself to be still the old Jean in the midst of the new one. Then she proved the new one ascendant by immediately adding in her thoughts : “ I believe I'll try to make father's favorite pudding for dinner ; mother marked it in the

book. And I don't believe any one remembered to feed Penny and Funny this morning."

She turned, then heard a step coming toward her, muffled by the fog, but growing clearer, and, in a moment, explained by the advent of a tall figure coming around the corner of the house. Jean turned and the big boy smiled up at her cordially. The big boy's face was handsome and wholesome, one of those truthful, friendly faces which seem to dissipate fogs of all sorts and, at the same time, to make everything around them seem foggy by contrast. The boy was evidently two or three years older than Jean, which would have entitled him to the respectful title of "young man," but there was a quality of boyhood about him that made Jean, at sixteen, seem older than he, at nearly nineteen. Jean had spent her life thoughtfully, while this neighbor lad had spent his actively, so Jean was actually his equal in maturity and allowed herself to feel decidedly his superior, for he was not bookish and she looked down upon him from her greater mental altitude. Still Jean liked him, liked and respected him more than she admitted to herself.

"Hallo, Roger—good-morning," she said.

"Just came around to see you were all right, Jean," returned Roger cheerfully, looking with pity in his honest eyes at Jean's swollen ones. It was ungrateful

of her not to appreciate how blind he was to the marring effect of tears. "If there's anything you want, anything Rod isn't able to do for you, call on me. I'm going to sign myself: 'Faithfully and devotedly your servant, Roger Cathcart,' all the while your mother is gone."

"You are a good boy, Roger," said Jean. "I ought to get on. Tidewater is rallying around me. I suppose it is because Tidewater knows I'm no good at house-keeping; it knows that 'united I stand, divided I fall.'"

Roger laughed. "You never got the chance to show what you could do ——"

"Never took it," murmured Jean.

"But you'll get there all right," Roger ended his sentence, disregarding her. "Look here, Jean, perhaps you don't care about my opinion, but I'd like to have you understand that I think it's fine the way you've packed your mother off and saddled everything yourself. If you do think, as you once told me, that I'm the only one in all Tidewater who laughs at your aspirations and has no interest in your poetry, you can be mighty sure I appreciate this phase of you! And I'm awfully glad, Jean, that you've got it in you. I like to see you doing big things, though you do think I don't. It's only that we differed in our measure of what was biggest."

“Really, Roger Cathcart,” said Jean, “it doesn’t strike me as particularly praiseworthy that a girl sixteen years old should keep house for her mother under these circumstances. Most girls would be willing to do as much as that to save their mother’s life. I don’t mind your thinking I ought not to devote myself to writing, and I don’t feel overwhelmed by your approval of my giving it up for a while—of course you know it is only for a while.”

Roger smiled amiably, so amiably that it was trying to one who was doing her best to snub him.

“I love little pussy,
Her temper’s so warm,
But her claws are too tiny
To do me much harm,”

he chanted, and his singing voice was delightful. “You didn’t know I could make up poetry too, did you, Jeannie? I’ll forgive you, little girl! Under these circumstances, as you say, I can’t very well be nasty to you in return, can I?” he asked, satisfied to see that Jean was really getting annoyed and so forgetting her trouble. “Jean, in all seriousness,” Roger went on, “I have taken off my hat to you, knowing what a hard time this is for you, and you can’t make me cover as long as you so thoroughly deserve my respectful ad-

miration. Say, Jean dear, don't be so frosty, so prickly, and don't pretend you don't know how much I appreciate all your talents, because I know you do. I wish we could get back to the old chummy days when we were in the third and fifth readers, respectively. You got to be a chestnut burr along about the time you went into the sixth, and I passed up to the high school. Little Jean Wolcott, all eyes, and with hair that tickled a big boy when he carried her books home and helped her over mud puddles, was a dear, sweet, friendly little chum ! I wish I had her back, only a little bigger. This is going to be a hard pull for you, mighty hard ; you haven't an idea how tired you'll be after a while, and you'll be so lonely and discouraged sometimes that it will take all there is to get through it. Now, when those days come, I wish, I most tremendously wish, you'd say to yourself : ' There's Roger ; I'll call on him ! ' It would make me no end happy if I could do anything for you. Rod's only fifteen, and, though Steve is a little brick, he and Dorcas are children. I'm nearly three years older than you are, and if there were anything I could do for you, from chopping wood to taking you walking or rowing when you want heartening, it would be like finding a pot of gold to have you call on me. Honest, Jean, please count on me, at least while you're fighting this battle."

Roger stood with his foot on the lower step, looking up through the fog with such warm, true eyes that Jean melted under their gaze. Her chin trembled a little and she flushed, as she said gently :

“ You are kind, Roger, and I do thank you ! If I need you I will call upon you, but I don’t see what there can be for you to do. I don’t mean to let myself get discouraged. Still, I suppose it will be harder than I realize, because I’m not used to being useful—not this way. You’ll never get me to admit that a poet is not at least as useful as a cook.”

“ Be a woman first and a poet afterward,” cried Roger eagerly. “ There are plenty of valuable women who are not poets, but I don’t see what good a poet is if she isn’t a true, womanly woman.”

“ Oh, dear ; you’re only a big boy, but you’re just like all men ! ” sighed Jean. “ What you mean when you say ‘ a true womanly woman ’ is one who knows how to sew for you and bake and brew for you. I don’t believe a poet ought to be anything but a poet. I think it must be true that each art demands every bit of the person who tries to worship it.”

“ Then how could a fellow help hating this art talk, if art is going to claim all there is of the sweetest and best —— ”

“ Roger,” interrupted Jean hotly, “ you are such a

dunce ! Just as soon—if it ever does happen !—as we begin to get back to that third-and-fifth-reader chumminess you sigh for, you spoil it ! How can I like you when you are so selfish, so horrid, so unsympathetic to the best in me ? Oh, dear me ; just a minute ago you were so nice and kind and I felt as though I'd count you right in with Rod and Steve ! And now I'm cross to you again and saying hard things to you ! It's all your fault, really. When I want a friend I have to count on Helen ; you can depend on her. She likes me, but she isn't jealous of my work ; she doesn't want me to let my best gift rust out ; she wouldn't like to have me turn into a drab, flat, thin, worn-out, ordinary creature like Minervy Tappan, the rag carpet weaver over at Tidewater Centre ! ”

To his own chagrin a moment later, and to Jean's present disgust, Roger threw back his head and laughed at this tirade, laughed so loud and heartily that the peal seemed to make a hole in the fog. Instantly he checked himself, however, and solemnly begged Jean's pardon.

“ That struck me as an extreme statement, that's all,” he explained. “ I'm not conscious of desiring you to grow like Minervy Tappan.”

“ There's no use, Roger ; we always quarrel,” said Jean turning away.

“Only one of us, Jean, only one of us,” protested Roger eagerly. “I never quarrel. My mother asked me to say to you, Jean, that if there’s anything that you want to know run over to her at any hour of the day or night and she will be only too glad to help you out with advice or service. She says to go to her in any sort of trouble, just as you would go to your mother—as near as it can be.”

“She is a dear,” said Jean heartily. “Your mother is not only the best housekeeper, but the best woman in all the Tidewaters—now that my mother is away! Thank her, and tell her I shall be grateful for her help when I get into a scrape. Now I must go in, Roger; I have a great deal to do.”

“Run along, little boy; go play,” laughed Roger. “All right; I’ll go. Forgive me, Jean, if I offended you. Indeed I didn’t mean any harm. But it didn’t harm you to get a bit huffy; you can’t feel sad and huffy at the same time.”

“Did you make me provoked purposely?” demanded Jean, minded both to laugh and to be annoyed afresh.

“Not exactly; it happened, but I saw at once how lucky it was,” said Roger with his jolly laugh.

“You treat me as if I were no older than Dorcas,” said Jean, still between wrath and amusement.

“That comes of beginning to get acquainted when you

weren't as old as Dorcas," retorted Roger. "Good-bye, Jeannie. Don't forget that you've promised to let me be first aid to the injured, if you're it, and however you're injured. And try to forget how mean I am! Honest truth, Jean, I haven't a thing in the world against poetry and poets, if only they don't get such hold of you that nobody can pull you loose."

"Oh, I know you're all right, Roger; you're as nice as a boy can be in all sensible, practical ways," said Jean, getting even with him.

Roger made a wry face. "Sounds as if I were a ham sandwich," he said.

"You've actually remembered hearing of Roger Bacon, I do believe! That's what made you think of ham sandwiches, when a hammer would have been as appropriate," cried Jean, this time quite gleefully. "Good-bye, Roger. I mayn't seem so, but I am grateful, and I'll be more so when you've gone and I can think over your kindness without your being here rubbing me up the wrong way."

Roger started off at a dead run on hearing this, pulling down his hat with one hand, waving the other in farewell behind him without turning around, as if to show that his presence having such bad effect he would lose no time in removing himself.

Jean went into the house laughing. It was only

when she had walked through to the kitchen that she realized that she had thus entered the house which, a short time before, had seemed too dreary to go into.

“Well, Roger really is nice,” she said aloud in her surprise. “He’s commonplace, I suppose, but he’s awfully kind and loyal.” Then she fell to putting coal on the stove with much energy, her spirits more cheerful than she could have believed they would be on this first, melancholy morning.

Rod and Steve came in, Dorcas following them. They all three glanced with elaborate carelessness at Jean, and showed their relieved surprise plainly when they saw her smiling.

“Any chance of eating?” inquired Rod.

“We’re going to have a regular banquet dinner, but it is going to be late,” replied Jean confidently.

CHAPTER IV

JEAN THE HOUSEKEEPER

WHO that has ever continued in well-doing does not know the difference between courageous beginning and the dead level of discouraging mid-way ?

That first dinner of Jean's was a success ; the meat was neither too rare nor burned, the vegetables condescended to boil in time and not to pieces, and Mr. Wolcott's favorite pudding turned out in possession of its usual virtues.

Rod and Steve were angels of helpfulness, not only that first day, but for three days, and Dorcas laid aside her pranks and soberly helped her big sister for a little longer than that. When Dorcas chose to be useful she was equal to an assistant of several more years ; she saw what needed doing and she competently did it. As Miss Lizzie Babcock said, "Dorcas was as smart as a steel trap and keen as a weasel, but she had such an all-over mindedness that it didn't seem to do any good. However," she charitably added, "a person wasn't over turning-out days, let alone dead and buried, at ten years old."

Tidewater hoped a great deal from Dorcas Wolcott's "turning out," and it began to take heart in regard to Jean, whose neglected talent it inconsistently mourned, while rejoicing in the way the girl was taking the helm at a crisis. Tidewater had a great deal of interest in all the members of its younger generations, and each family knew precisely wherein all the others had made a mistake in training their children.

Steve was the only one who went on steadily after the first eager embracing of martyrdom, the first enthusiasm of doing hard things for the dear, sick mother's sake. Steve helped Jean with perfect fidelity, never forgot, never lost patience; Jean was ashamed of her own unvoiced temptations to weary when she saw reliable little Steve plodding along "like his own grandfather," she told him lovingly.

Mr. Wolcott's birthday was the twenty-third of May and Jean resolved to celebrate it by a small party. The guests could not be chosen from among Mr. Wolcott's special cronies, for he had none. Friendly with every one in all the Tidewaters Mr. Wolcott had no close friends, as how could he have, withdrawn from mankind, dreaming days away up in the tower room? So, lacking specially appropriate people to invite, Jean asked Helen and Roger, who would enliven the occasion, and Mrs. Claudia Wolcott.

Mr. Wolcott liked his stepmother exceedingly. She was an eccentric person, not given to demonstration, but when she liked any one she liked them thoroughly, and she disliked as profoundly and immovably. She had been a just and kind stepmother to the little Bentley Wolcott and the two had remained good friends, in their queer way, seeing little of each other, but retaining considerable affection for each other through subsequent years. The Wolcott children, except Dorcas, all had feared and consequently disliked their "Step-grand," each in turn, during their early childhood, but as they grew older they were juster to her, and Jean had now reached the point of liking her. Dorcas had never feared her ; Dorcas had always thought her funny, but Dorcas feared no one and nothing ; Dorcas saw something humorous in nearly everything in creation.

Helen came over on the morning of the twenty-third to stay all day and help Jean get up the birthday dinner. It was to be an innovation in Tidewater, a dinner at seven o'clock, and though the guests were but three, and one of them her assistant, only one of them formidable, still Jean was flustered by the undertaking.

"I told father that he must look perfectly beautiful this evening, Nell," said Jean, whisking out a mixing bowl and dusting it—though it did not require it—before she set it on the table. "I want Step-grand to see

that he is not neglected. You know father is just as likely to come down at the last moment in his working coat as not! Mother always says that she dreads the longer days because father forgets six o'clock; if he gets an inspiration he goes on working in the tower room till the light fades! However, I can't say much; I'm his own child! Rod promised to go up at quarter past six to-night and see that he is made lovely. And Rod is getting to be the most fussy boy about clothes you ever saw! Father seemed very much pleased when I told him about the dinner. He said it was a keen pleasure to have his first baby remembering his birthday, and grown big enough to give him a dinner party. Wasn't that a nice, 'cute little speech? Father is really a duck when you can get him up out of the water; he's so apt to be 'way below the surface! Helen, I had another cheerful letter from mother to-day. She says she feels the strength returning and the doctor at the sanatorium encourages her! I meant to have told you the first thing."

"I thought you had heard again," nodded Helen. "You are always chattering like this on your letter day."

"If only there never comes any other news from there!" Jean said. "Of course the first ones couldn't be much, either way, but these last two say mother

feels better. Nell, it makes up for this and this and this!" Jean dropped her utensils and held up her hand, pointing to a burn, a cut and a blister in turn as she spoke.

"Your pretty hands!" said Helen regretfully. "I always envied you your hands, but I'm not mean enough to want them spoiled." She looked dissatisfiedly at her own firmly knit hands as she spoke and then at Jean's, slender, shapely, small, full of refinement, nervously expressive. "I don't mind the wounds so much, for they will heal, but they are getting roughened."

"Yes," said Jean pensively. "I hate it. But maybe that will wear away, too. Though I don't see how it can, for I mean to keep on using them after mother comes back. No more idleness for these little paws! But if I found I could earn money writing it wouldn't be wrong for me to do that and hire some one to do housework, would it? Because I don't believe I ever in all this world could do it well!"

"Of course it wouldn't be wrong! Any more than it would be wrong for the boys to go into business instead of doing housework. Mother said the other day she really believed you were intended for other things, and had been right to dream of being a writer. She said it was all the more praiseworthy in you to do so well

now," said Helen, whose admiration for Jean knew no bounds.

"Well, whatever is to happen by and by I can feel that this is good for me now," said Jean cheerfully. "I couldn't tell to save me what it is doing to me, but I can feel myself stretching out, as if I were growing big, inside, you know—in my mind and soul."

"And when you get into a stew—as you do pretty often, Jeannie!—I suppose that is your soul creaking as it stretches out, isn't it?" asked Helen.

"I 'spect!" agreed Jean, and both girls laughed with girlish enjoyment of a small jest. "Now where is that Dorcas witch?" demanded Jean, sobering down to the realities of what was before her and a sudden realization of its being nearly eleven o'clock.

"I'd like to see the person who could answer that question!" cried Helen. "Do you need her? I'll hunt her up for you."

"I want her to stone raisins," said Jean.

"Don't begin that cake before lunch, Jean. You'll get into a rush. Let's stuff the chicken and then get the boys' lunch ready; they'll soon be in, and get it out of the way early, and then make our cake and dessert with a calm, unflustered mind," suggested Helen, whose aversion to haste kept her from many an error.

“All right, Helen Lumley-lub’ly!” assented Jean. “It’s not for the likes of me to say you’re wrong. Steve gets dismissed at quarter to twelve to help me, you know; Rod comes in at ten minutes after twelve. I’m going to give them a cold lunch with hope to-day—hope of a big dinner at night.”

After the lunch had been hastily eaten and cleared away Dorcas appeared, nonchalant, at her ease, in spite of the fact that she was late and Jean was anxious about her, and in spite of the disconcerting fact that she was dripping from head to foot.

“Dorcas Wolcott, what is it this time?” cried Jean, beginning to pull off her clothing, for to be wet through and through in May is not safe nor comfortable.

“You’d better have sent me to school, Jean,” said Dorcas, laying the blame on the foundation of the day, not on her own subsequent actions. “Old Sam Webster, down on the beach, said: ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.’ Seems ’s if Satan watched my hands all the time to see when they’re idle, doesn’t it?”

“It certainly does,” agreed Jean with gusto. “Oh, Nell, you are a regular mother-in-Israel girl! That warm blanket is just what this little sinner needs! I’ll wrap you up and set you in front of the stove and give

you hot milk, Dorcas. If you aren't sick it will be a mercy! Nell, let's rub her; I ought to do something worse than that, I'm sure! Tell me what you've been up to, Dorcas."

"Oh, you talk so much a person can't tell you," sighed Dorcas. "I went down on the beach and I met a boy; he was a Portuguese boy, I guess, because nobody could be tanned so black in May. I talked to him and he was quite nice. He said he was awfully strong, 'cause he hauled codfish lines and bluefish, too, in summer, and rowed. And I bet him I could push that old dory out; you know—the one that's been hauled up on the beach so long. And he dared me try it. So I did, and I got it out, too! Then we thought we'd play Spanish Armada. He was all right for the Spanish part, you know; it's 'most the same. And we went out a little way. The old dory leaked like everything, so it sank pretty soon, but I was so wet before that it didn't matter."

"Dorcas! You can't swim!" cried Jean, white with horror over this worse prank than usual.

"No, but the boy could, dandy," said Dorcas calmly. "He saved me, towed me in. It's exciting having your life saved!"

"Dorcas, what can I say to you?" cried Jean in profound distress. "There is nothing I can say that you

do not already know. You are much too old to do such a thing as this. This is entirely beyond mischief. Do you think there is any excuse for a girl of ten risking her life, risking her poor mother's coming home to find her drowned ? ”

Dorcas looked at Jean with a twinkle. “Mother wouldn't like any better to have me drowned if she was at home,” she said.

Then, her sense of nonsense satisfied, she suddenly became contrite, threw her arms around her sister, and wheedled her with eyes no longer laughing, but melting. “Of course I know better, Jean,” she said. “I know a lot better than I do all the time, only when I do things I don't seem to know better, not that minute. It just seems as though there wasn't anything better than what I'm going to do. I'm sorry.”

“Well, dear,” said Jean, feeling that Dorcas might well be beyond her wisdom, since their mother found her a problem, “I suppose we must do as mother says, and get on with you a day at a time and hope you'll be a little less dreadful some time.”

“Jean Wolcott,” said Dorcas with a swift change of manner, “I can't stand this; I'm cooking. I don't think I ought to be roasted on my own father's birthday because I might have been drowned.”

“Run away, then, and dress yourself,” sighed Jean,

adding to Helen, as Dorcas fled and the two big girls allowed themselves to laugh : “ Did you ever in all your life see such a child ? Nothing makes the least dent on her mind ; she’s thistle-down ! ”

Dorcas returned freshly clad and somewhat subdued, and Jean set her to stoning raisins. She perched herself on a step-ladder that happened to be in the kitchen, seating herself backward, her feet thrust through the back of the steps, using the step above her as a work table for her bowl of fruit and her bowl of water to dip sticky fingers in. Thus she managed to render her task less monotonous.

“ Some one’s coming, Jean,” announced Dorcas presently, her height giving her command of a greater length of view than those on the floor had.

“ Some one coming—oh, dear ! Why, it’s Step-grand already ! ” exclaimed Jean.

“ I came early to see how you were getting on, Jean,” said Mrs. Claudia Wolcott as she entered, following speedily upon Dorcas’ announcement of her coming.

“ Beautifully, Step-grand,” cried Jean, presenting her flushed cheek to Mrs. Wolcott, who ignored it, not approving of kissing.

“ You look better,” said Mrs. Wolcott. “ I always said there wasn’t a thing the matter with you but

inertia, clear inertia. I've always told your mother from the start, 'Mary,' I used to say when you were almost a baby, "she may be only two, or four, or six"—all along I used to say this—"but all that ails that child is pure nothingness! The minute she is interested in something she gets color and is as lively as a cricket. You give Jean part of the housework, Mary," I used to say as you grew older, "you put her to work and stop her dawdling over her books and poetry writing and you'll find out she'll come out all right." But your mother wouldn't hear to forcing you; dreadfully afraid of losing you she was from the start, because you were a big-eyed, pale, quiet little thing. Pallor isn't a sign, not always. You're not pale now, though; never saw you looking so well. And you get on nicely, do you? Helen probably helps you."

"Yes, I get on fairly, and I'm learning; Helen does help," said Jean modestly.

"H'm! Let me look into your closets," said Mrs. Claudia Wolcott. "The middle of the floor doesn't prove a thing, still less the parlor, but show me the kitchen corners and the closets and I'll know what kind of housekeeping's done."

She threw open the kitchen closet door as she spoke, surveyed the shelves critically, followed this investigation with one of the pantry, equally keen, while Dorcas,

unnoted on her perch, grew red and puffy-cheeked in a desperate effort to keep from laughing.

“Pretty well, step-granddaughter, pretty well,” said Jean’s eccentric relative, turning upon the girl as she closed the last door. “I’m going up-stairs to lay off my things, and then, if there’s anything I can do to help with this solemn dinner, I’ll come down and do it. I have an apron on under my skirt, so all I have to do is to whisk it off and put it on over the skirt. Never borrow; that’s my motto—one of my mottoes!”

“I imagine Step-grand has a whole mindful of mottoes to go by,” said Jean as Mrs. Claudia Wolcott disappeared.

When she came back the apron and skirt had reversed their order; her black skirt was competently shrouded in blue and white gingham which nearly met in the back.

“At least you don’t clutter,” Mrs. Wolcott said as she entered. “The rooms up-stairs look neat. I abhor cluttering. Keep in order as you go and you won’t need tremendous upheavals, I say. It’s just as true in the moral order as it is of housekeeping. Dorcas, why on earth are you looped through that step-ladder backward? What are you on a ladder for at all?” she demanded, suddenly espying Dorcas.

“Dorcas finds it easier to do her duty if she does

it in a queer position," laughed Jean. "Dear Step-grand, there isn't anything for you to do now. Sit down by the window and talk to us."

"I'll knit," said Mrs. Wolcott, producing her work from a bag she carried; she never wasted time.

Mrs. Claudia knit and talked her eccentric, crisp, yet kindly wisdom to the girls, proving her consideration by knitting steadily and not seeming to see that Helen took hold of everything that she did less awkwardly than Jean, nor that Dorcas, descended from her pinnacle, her task completed, rebelled in vigorous dumb protest, lest her elderly relative discover her, against being required to help with table setting in the dining-room. But the sharp eyes were still sharp, in spite of spectacles; Mrs. Claudia Wolcott saw everything, though the glasses she then wore were reading glasses, not for long distance.

The boys came in, Steve early, and he began to carry out ashes and bring in coal, to pump water for Old King Cole and take it out to him, without a word of suggestion from Jean. Rod came in late, in a fluster, flushed, handsome, laughing, saluted Mrs. Wolcott with a kiss on her forehead before she had time to head him off with a hand-shake, pulled Dorcas' hair and Funny's tail, impartially, by way of greeting, and urgently demanded of Jean what he should do.

“Your brother’s done all the chores already,” Mrs. Wolcott forestalled Jean in replying, and Rodney’s face darkened, for he greatly wished to be admired.

“There isn’t anything just now, Rod,” said Jean, fulfilling her mother’s task of soothing the elder boy’s wounded vanity. Rod frequently was annoyed by an implication that he was remiss. Rodney wanted hungrily to be rated high, but he did not always make sure of his rating by deserving it. “Perhaps you may as well go up and see that father is getting ready now. That was to be Rod’s part of the preparations, Step-grand,” Jean continued. “I honestly believe that our dinner is a brilliant success! Everything father likes best and everything turned out good! Just make him beautiful, Rodney, and we’ll have dinner served a little before the time we set. There comes Roger now! And he’s bringing flowers! Isn’t that fine! Helen and I could not get any; we were going to use the fern dish. Roger must have sent for flowers somewhere.”

Roger came in with established intimacy, straight into the kitchen.

“Hallo, cook; where’s the lady of the house?” he cried, going up to Jean, oblivious to any one else for a moment.

“Here she is!” said Jean, pulling her apron around

to the back and assuming an air to suit the rôle of hostess, as she offered Roger her hand.

“There are no flowers in Tidewater to-day, so I had these sent down from Boston by parcels post,” Roger said, giving the big white box he carried to Jean. “They are all tulips. I decided, if your father was born in May, he must have a flower that blooms outdoors in his own month.”

“That’s what I call a delicate and poetical thought, Roger,” cried Jean, in refreshing enthusiasm. “Run get the cut glass bowl, the big one, Steve, and Dorcas, bring the tall glass. We’ll make a sheaf of tulips growing out of a bowl of themselves. Oh, Roger, they are glorious!” The whole room seemed filled by the radiance, the spring odor of the glowing, crisp tulips as Jean shook them out on the table, where they lay as if a mammoth kaleidoscope had been broken on it.

Rodney came slowly into the room, his face a study. “Say, Jean, where is father?” he asked.

“In the tower room? Then in his own room?” said Jean interrogatively, as Rod shook his head.

“Not a bit,” Rod said. “I’ve hunted all through; he’s gone. Bet you what you dare he’s forgotten and gone off!”

“Oh, no, he hasn’t; he couldn’t!” cried Jean, tears in her voice at the mere possibility, and a sudden

sense of fatigue upon her. "He's—you've overlooked him!"

"As if he were a walking stick! Likely!" said Rod. "He's not in this house, that's sure."

"I'll go down street and see if he's anywhere around," said Steve. "Don't worry, Jean; he'll turn up. It's early yet. He'll get hungry and remember. I'll go hunt him."

"Such a nice dinner, everything he loves, and it will be spoiled!" cried Jean.

"Now, Jean, there's a large majority here to enjoy it. If your father doesn't turn up we'll wish him well and eat his feast without him. There never was the least use in worrying over Bentley Wolcott," interposed Mrs. Claudia Wolcott philosophically.

"Well, what a way to have a birthday dinner!" cried Jean.

Steve came back looking gloomy. "He's gone to Tidewater Centre, Jean," he announced. "He was in the drug store on his way and said he was going there. So it's no good waiting for him."

"Oh, for pity's sake!" cried Jean, tears in her eyes this time.

"Just the same when he was a boy!" remarked Mrs. Wolcott. "Don't marry an absent-minded man, Jean."

"I don't want to marry any kind of a man," cried

Jean petulantly. "No woman would forget how tired you were and how hard you'd tried, let alone forgetting her birthday!"

"It isn't so much the absent mind as it is the absent body that makes this a fluke, Mrs. Wolcott," laughed Roger, trying to be cheering. "Come on, Jean; serve your dinner, and be charitable enough to be glad you've got a good one for us; I'm ravenous! We'll eat your father's health and he'll be along in time to join us; perhaps he'll remember on the way and come back."

Jean shook her head dismally, but yielded to necessity. Helen, the three boys, Dorcas and she bore in the steaming viands, but their fragrance no longer was delicious to the disappointed hostess-cook. Here was where Rodney's talents scored above Steve. He talked such a stream of clever nonsense that no one could help laughing, and, with her first few mouthfuls Jean felt better; she was tired and hungry. By the time dinner was over she could see how ridiculous the whole thing was and pledge her father in the coffee fairly cheerfully.

Mr. Wolcott came hurrying in at the last crumb of dessert, breathless, contrite, but plainly enjoying himself.

"My dear child, how can I make this up to you?" he said. "When you were such a good child to try to

keep the day as your mother would do ! But I had a great idea occur to me, and the truth is it made me forget all about day and dinner. I hurried off to Tidewater Centre to see Baxter, who would know if it was the solution of a difficulty that had balked me for weeks. He says it is ! Jean, that's enough birthday joy ! Now, will you forgive your father, your dreaming father, and give me my birthday dinner after all ? I'm certain it was good enough to make it better at a second serving than any other dinner could be ! ”

“ Oh, yes, father ! I don't see how I could punish you by making you go to bed dinnerless on your birthday ! I don't believe it is quite spoiled, though nothing can be as good as it was at first,” said Jean, while in duet with her Mr. Wolcott's stepmother said :

“ You are incorrigible, perfectly incorrigible, Bentley ; always will be.”

“ Well, maybe it's better this way,” cried Dorcas unexpectedly. “ It will be more like a banquet ; it will take so long to serve it over again to papa. And I believe I could eat a little more myself.”

CHAPTER V

JEAN'S OPPORTUNITY

"I'M just as busy as I can be this morning, Roger," said Jean as Roger turned in at the gate on the morning of Memorial Day.

"If you had lived in the crusading days and had been a man, you never would have been a Knight Hospitaller — Oh, that's what comes of my trying to be clever! It's hospitable I meant, so that neat little allusion doesn't work out well." Roger energetically thumped his head to suggest it was wooden.

"Besides which I'm a girl, a New England girl, born in the nineteenth century, so I seem to have missed being any kind of a knight by a wide margin," cried Jean. "I've no time to play, Roger, and I won't ask you in. Hospitality is all very fine, but I can't practice all the virtues at once, and this morning I have lots to do."

"It's a holiday," suggested Roger.

Jean shook her head. "Not in the old Wolcott house, nor for the young Wolcott girl. I didn't get through what I had to do yesterday, so it overlaps

into to-day. When I began housekeeping alone I thought it didn't matter if I let some things go over till the next day, but I see there isn't any next day. When it gets here it is to-day and stuck as full of its own work as a pin ball with pins. I've found out I come to grief if I don't keep squared up as I go, so 'Memorandum Day' doesn't count this year as a holiday for Jean Wolcott."

"Memorandum Day?" laughed Roger.

"That's what Rod told me old deaf Peter Woods called it yesterday; we were laughing over it last night," explained Jean. "Roger, wouldn't it be dreadful if I had to strike my colors and get some one to do the cooking? This is a secret I haven't told any one but Helen, but I'm afraid I may have to give in. I don't—I do *not* want to! But I get so tired, and when I'm tired I'm so stupid, and drop things so!"

Roger looked unutterable pity. "You poor little genius! But everybody is praising you to the nines. Mother says she thinks you are wonderful. It's only you who say you're stupid. You've held out a whole month."

"Yes. Mother's been gone a month," agreed Jean sadly. "And she is better; she says she thinks she can truly say it is really being better, not merely rested. I try to keep in sight what Memorial Day might have been.

Isn't it horrid, Roger, but such a silly little thing as aching feet makes it hard to remember that mother might have died! You can be as splendid as you like when you're rested, but when you're tired it seems as if nothing in the whole world made much difference! I don't see how I can feel as if I didn't care, sometimes, when I know all the time I do care so much."

"That's only because your mother is better and your tiredness is not. If your mother were failing you wouldn't remember your aching muscles. All the more credit, plucky little Jean of Arc, to carry your banner when you've got dust in your eyes and don't see it clearly," Roger comforted her.

"That was a lovely speech, Roger!" cried Jean with unflattering surprise. "It was almost poetical. And true and kind; thank you. You're really very nice indeed—when you are nice."

"Jean, on the day of judgment you'll never be blamed for having spoiled me with strong praise," cried Roger with a shout of laughter at this grudging admission, yet not minding the grudging since he saw that Jean was more pleased than she said by his tribute to her courage amid discouragement. "Well, I came to take you out rowing, and maybe to try the *Maid of Orleans*, if you'd go. It's the exact breeze for a cat-boat."

"Indeed I can't go," said Jean, turning away with refreshed memory of all that awaited her. "I do wish you wouldn't call your boat that, Roger."

"I'd like to know why not!" protested Roger innocently. "It isn't your name; you're not the Maid of Orleans. I don't see that it is my fault if Jeanne d' Arc and you had the same first name. I promised I wouldn't name my boat the *Jean*, and did I?"

Jean disdained to reply. It was pleasant to know that Roger thought there was no other girl in the world worth naming his boat for, but it was not pleasant to know that he knew that she knew he thought so. Jean never got as far as putting her feeling as to Roger Cathcart into form, but she was positive of one thing and that was that she "wouldn't let him be silly."

At that moment a young man appeared around the corner of the house, a stranger who took off his hat and held it, as he presented himself in his perfect and palpably urban garments before the surprised Jean and Roger, who had not heard his coming. He addressed Jean, and his voice sounded like whipped cream that had not deserved its whipping; he still held his hat in his hand, deferentially.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I tried in vain to get a response to my summons at the other door, so I

came around. I am at loss how to open my appeal to you, except with the question, book-agent-like : Are you the lady of the house ? ”

“ I suppose I am, now,” said Jean. “ Are you—did you say you were a book ——”

“ No, no, my dear young lady. I merely said that my question was their established form of address ; of any agent, for that matter,” interrupted the newcomer hastily. “ I am nothing so practical as an agent. I am merely a sojourner on your beautiful coast. I want to stay here for some time, studying it. Not wholly from an artistic view-point, I may admit, but not without a large admixture of the artist’s unselfish love of nature with a business man’s harder headed interest. I was told that Mr. Bentley Wolcott lived here ; I think this can hardly be Mrs. Wolcott ? ”

He glanced at Roger as if passingly estimating his chance of being Mr. Wolcott, and Jean said quickly, though she was bewildered by the stranger’s flow of words and elaborate manner : “ I am Miss Wolcott ; Mrs. Wolcott is away. Is there anything I can do in her stead ? ”

“ Miss Wolcott, if you are in authority over this attractive old house, so charmingly placed on the very brow of this cliff above the sea, then you can do that which, for the moment, I want above all things. You

can let me be an inmate of this house while I am in Tidewater."

The stranger offered Jean a card which he extracted from a red Russia leather case. She took it and read: "Mr. Anthony Dillon."

She looked up, frowning in a puzzled way, and Roger, still lingering, fidgeted.

"Become an inmate of this house? Do you mean board here?" she asked.

"Precisely. Now don't say no," Mr. Dillon remonstrated, anticipating the refusal that Jean's lips were forming. "I will promise not to be the slightest trouble. Needless to say I shall be only too grateful and appreciative if you let me come. Your own household surely requires more elaborate meals than I want; bread and butter, coffee, fruit—I ask no more. I am quiet, though not stealthy in my movements! You shall never be disturbed by my comings and goings, and my dear mother used to say that no girl was ever neater and more orderly in her room than was her second son Tony, the Anthony Dillon of that card. Miss Wolcott, be charitable and do not say me nay! I have set my heart on coming here."

The look that he gave pretty young Jean implied that he was not blind to beauty other than the ocean's. Roger scowled and Jean blushed, but the implied com-

pliment in his glance did not attract Jean to him. She was sensible enough to know that he had no right even to imply a compliment, and she was still so young that flattery embarrassed her. She shook her head decidedly.

“I am sorry if you have set your heart on coming here, Mr. Dillon,” she said, “for it is quite as impossible as if you had set your heart on going to Mars. Fancy my taking a boarder!” She glanced at Roger with a smile. “My mother is away and I am not succeeding well in filling her place. Besides, we never take boarders. There are a great many in the Tidewaters who do. There is a good hotel here and another at the Centre, though that one is not on the shore. And there are ever so many families who take boarders in the summer; you will easily find a place. But not in the old Wolcott house.”

“Well, it is hard luck to find exactly what you want and not be able to get it,” said Mr. Dillon with a sigh. “I think I know resolution when I see it, and I don’t believe you are to be moved.”

“Not by pleading, nor by violence,” smiled Jean, relenting as she saw that the interview was ending. “This is Mr. Cathcart. He is going down the street; perhaps he will point out some of the boarding-places to you. I am sorry if you really fancy this house

especially, Mr. Dillon, but I couldn't possibly let any one board here."

"Don't be sorry, Miss Wolcott—thanks for it, nevertheless. I am sorry enough for us both," said Mr. Anthony Dillon.

Jean rather admired the good nature with which he accepted his refusal, but Roger scowled again at his saying "us both," by which friendly coupling Roger fancied Mr. Dillon was enjoying the effect of acquaintance with Jean. It happened that Roger's suspicious jealousy was on the wrong scent, and that something quite other than a desire to win pretty little Jean's favor actuated Mr. Anthony Dillon, of whose motives Jean and Roger were to know more later.

"I'll show you the way to the Tidewater Inn," said Roger shortly. "Good-bye, Jean. See you to-night, maybe. Are you ready, Mr. Dillon?" Roger waved his hand in a parting salute to Jean, Mr. Dillon bowed impressively, and the two young men walked away together.

Jean watched them out of sight. Mr. Dillon was not less than five years Roger's elder, which placed him indefinitely beyond the pale of Jean's understanding. To her sixteen years, twenty-five or six was young by comparison only; a grown man was a grown man, and her sense of comradeship did not extend beyond Roger's years.

This Anthony Dillon was handsome, a trifle heavily built, a trifle overemphasized in every way, a little too carefully dressed, too elaborate mannered, too highly colored, yet there was something about him that, while she was conscious of being repelled by him herself, Jean was keen enough to see might be attractive to many. So she understood Rod's enthusiasm, in part, when he came in late to dinner and launched into praise of the stranger.

"Met Roge down the street, near the hotel, with the dandiest chap!" he cried. "Fellow from Boston, Mr. Dillon. Roge introduced me and he's all right, treated me white, asked questions about the early settlement of the Tidewaters—this was after Roger went off. He's quite a good deal older than Roger, but he doesn't put on any side; treated me as one man treats another." Rodney swelled visibly. "Awfully handsome chap, and has swell clothes. He's going to stay in town a while, got a bad crush on the place. I told him it was all right, I supposed, but pretty slow for the year 'round. He said he'd met my sister. Where'd you meet him, sis?"

"There was a man named Dillon here this morning; maybe it is he," said Jean, conscious of a thorough dislike for the stranger that she had not felt till she heard Rodney's raptures over him and saw that he had played

upon the handsome boy's easily fostered conceit. "He wanted to board here; gave me his card. His name was Anthony Dillon. Perhaps it's the same one."

"Surest thing you know!" cried Rod. "What did you tell him? Wish you'd take him in; he would be a jolly chap to have around."

"I told him we did not take boarders," said Jean quietly. "I think it was impertinent to go to a private house and ask to be taken in; the hotel is for that. But I don't think I should want a stranger here now anyway, Rod."

"Suppose not," admitted Rod grudgingly. "But he's a peach all right. I thought he'd kill me with the things he said when the people came in from the cemetery. Those old Civil War G. A. R. men, hobbling along! Mr. Dillon said it stood for Grandfather Adam's Rally—I thought I'd die!"

"It stands for Grand Army of the Republic, the Republic those feeble old men gave their youth to save, and they are the remnant of the Army of the Potomac which Lincoln called for, and which came at his call!" cried Jean springing to her feet, the poet alive in her, her eyes flashing, her cheeks reddened, forgetting fatigue in her enthusiasm and indignation. "And you laughed when this Mr. Dillon made fun of the old G. A. R.! Rod, don't you remember? It's cheap to

laugh at poor old men, and worse to make fun of old soldiers who fought for the Union, even if they do limp along with funny old whiskers and funny old faces! They carry an old tattered flag, too! I always think they are alike. That's about the sort of man I thought that Mr. Dillon would be! Wolcotts were always patriots, Rodney; in the Revolution and in the Civil War. Our Great-uncle William was with the Sixth Massachusetts in Baltimore when it went out; don't you ever forget that, Rodney Wolcott."

"Say, Jean, don't get eloquent," said Rod lazily, because he was annoyed, and because he was in the wrong. "Funny if you can't see a joke because you're a patriot! If you don't look out, Jean, you'll get so there's no fun in you! Mr. Dillon's all right. I'm gone on him, but there's no such luck as our knowing him. He's a clever man, and we wouldn't interest him long. But he was mighty nice to me. Isn't it queer how a girl makes up her mind about any one right slap off and can't reason about it?"

"Isn't it queer how a boy makes up his mind just as quickly and won't let any one have a different opinion?" retorted Jean. Upon which Rodney stalked away with dignity, having learned that in an encounter of wits he never worsted Jean.

That evening Jean sat on the steps with Steve, feel-

ing vaguely dissatisfied. Her father had taken Dorcas for a holiday drive after supper to pay a call on Mrs. Claudia Wolcott. Rodney had gone out with the boys ; Steve only remained with Jean in that silent companionship which was Steve's peculiar and comforting way of keeping her company. The feeling of a holiday that had brought no holiday pleasures was all around Jean, with its sense of restlessness and unsatisfied craving.

Jean's face was in her hands, her knees drawn up, her elbows on them, and she looked out to sea, watching the revolving light in the farthest rock-founded lighthouse, not yet showing its full brilliance in the lingering light of the afterglow.

"I think that I shall get along well in business, Jean," said Steve soberly, out of a protracted silence. "If I do I shall live right here and you will live with me and I shall get you everything you want. I shall buy books enough to fill the biggest parlor, set up on shelves all round it, and you will be a great poet and write famous stories because you won't have one thing to bother you, or keep you from it."

"Steve, you are the nicest boy in all the world !" cried Jean with gratitude as genuine as if this somewhat uncertain future were assured. "How could you guess I was thinking of a story all day and trying not to fret because I couldn't write it ?"

"I didn't guess it," said Steve truthfully, "but you always are wishing you could write stories or something. I'm going to make it up to you, for you do the best you can for us. I'm pretty sure I can be a little rich, because books say it's the pokey ones that get there. My teacher made us write a kind of sermon on the hare and the tortoise the other day."

"You're not pokey, Steve; you're only steady—and you're a duck!" cried Jean warmly.

"You are the flower of this family," said Steve, still gravely. "I heard Mrs. Cathcart say so the other day, and it's true."

"I'm the flour—f-l-o-u-r—of the family lately!" laughed Jean, but she could not help showing her pleasure. "Here come Helen and Roger; Steve, they're going to ask us rowing!"

"You," amended Steve, which proved to be the case, but Steve was included in the invitation afterward, and they all four sallied forth, leaving the key of the house with the next door neighbor, after a time-honored custom.

There was a young moon and the sea was still. It was not a night to try the *Maid of Orleans*, which was the fastest catboat in the Tidewater harbor, but it was an ideal night for rowing. Helen and Roger were to pull going out, Steve and Roger coming back; it

was taken for granted that Jean needed rest—as indeed she did.

All the weariness of spirit, the weariness of body, a vague uneasiness that Rod gave her, the nervous irritation of Dorcas' ceaseless pranks, the abiding, though lessening anxiety for her mother, slipped off Jean's shoulders into the depths of the sleeping Atlantic. The moon, six days old, made a delicate glimmer of light for them to look back on at their starting. One by one the stars came out; the east was soon studded with them.

"Sing, Jean," ordered Roger, and Jean sang willingly. Her voice was not the strongest, but it was perfectly true, and its sweetness was rare, with a pathetic quality that made it a pensive delight to listen to it. She was entirely untaught, but her repertory was long, for both her father and her mother loved music, and sang to their children from the first days of their lives.

"Could we all sing something?" asked Helen; she spoke doubtfully, for her voice was not her best gift, but she dearly loved to sing.

"Why not? Steve's a regular warbler," said Roger.

"Only you can't sing quite smoothly while you're rowing; it jerks like grunts often," said Steve.

"Why not drift for a few moments?" suggested

Jean. "Hold the boat still, Roger and Steve, and let's sing together out here."

"Did you know Rod had gone out with that Mr. Dillon?" asked Roger. "They may think we're serenading them."

"Or they might recognize us and come up. We'll row slowly, then, and sing the best we can," said Jean. "I do wish Rod weren't so easily taken with strangers!"

"You didn't like him, either?" cried Roger. "I couldn't stand him. That was your chance to take a boarder. Opportunity knocks at your door but once, Jean!"

"I don't believe that's true, but if Mr. Dillon is opportunity I'd rather it would knock somewhere else the next time. Don't waste time; Steve and I must be back soon. Let's sing—what, Stevie?"

"All the patriotic songs, and then 'Crossing the Bar,' because it is Memorial Day," said Steve promptly.

"Stephen dear! You are the poet of the family, not I!" cried Jean. The silent, steady little boy was always a surprise to them all.

Steve's programme was carried out, and when the last note of "Crossing the Bar" sank into quiet over the placid sea no one felt like speaking. They rowed gently in, and disembarked in the damp dusk of the May night.

CHAPTER VI

JEAN'S MISGIVINGS

“**T**HERE’S no such thing as plain cooking,” declared Jean. “There is plain food, but cooking, the plainest of it, is not a plain thing to do; it’s complicated.”

She punctuated this statement by breathing on the forefinger of her left hand, holding it up and turning it around and around to cool the poor finger’s scalded tip. She was sitting on the top step facing the sea, but the pleasant breeze from the ocean did not lessen the crimson brightness of her finger.

Helen, beside her, with an arm over Jean’s shoulder, laughed, yet drew her closer with a sympathetic pressure.

“Has it been a hard day, Jean dearest?” she asked. “Why didn’t you send for me? And how did you get such a burn?”

“Three things were burning or boiling over at once; I moved the teakettle back too quickly to get at a saucepan and the steam scalded my finger—so then there was four things overdone!” said Jean.

“As to sending for you, Nell, if I don’t begin to depend on myself after more than a month of house-keeping, when shall I learn to go alone? I should dearly like to send for you once and for all, have you move into this house for the summer.”

“You poor genius!” cried Helen. “It is Pegasus in harness. It is pretty hard to turn such a complete somersault and have such a burden on your hands as a family, all at once.”

Jean nodded. “On burnt hands at that!” she said. “Really, the trouble this time was that it was Pegasus in harness, and the traces were loose. I didn’t mean to relapse into my old ways once while mother was gone, but when she went away I thought of a fine title for a poem and it’s been buzzing around in my head ever since. It was the Accolade of Courage— isn’t that great?”

“I—yes. What does it mean?” asked Helen.

Jean laughed. “What do you mean by saying yes if you don’t know?” she asked. “An accolade is the tap on the shoulder the knight receives when he is made a knight. The king gives him a tap with his sword and says: ‘Rise up, Sir Knight!’ That’s an accolade. Don’t you see? Courage gives some one the tap and makes him a knight; he would be only an ordinary man before that, but, after Courage gives him the accolade,

he is her knight, ready to do great deeds. I'm crazy about the idea. To-day it got hold of me so that I couldn't help trying to fit it out with rhymes while I was at work. It was a failure both ways, poem and cooking! I do believe I'll be worse than ever, if I don't look out! My rhyming will get in the way of cooking, and my cooking get in the way of rhyming, and then I shall be like those fashion book paper dolls we used to make—the head of one figure pasted on the body of another! It was too ridiculous to-day, Helen!" Jean's eyes danced and her voice grew cheerful. "I began the poem: 'Courage, the king, hath touched me with his sword.' That was not so awful, but then I wanted to say: 'And bade me knead my biscuits on the board.' To save my life I couldn't think of a sensible second line! Trying to get one made me burn my potatoes and cook the heads off my asparagus. I was so disgusted and tired when I got through! I don't believe I shall ever be thoroughly practical and reliable, like you."

"You won't ever be a plodder, like me," said Helen cheerfully. "We wouldn't want you to be. You will accomplish ever so much more in your life than I shall in mine. All you've got to do is to add a little homespun to your cloth-of-gold."

"Mercy me, Helen, if I am learning housekeeping,

you are getting poetical! Roger Cathcart thinks I'd be much nicer if I were a plodder. I can't quite like Roger, though he is the nicest boy I know, as long as he is so horrid about my wanting to write." And Jean frowned at her scalded forefinger in Roger's stead.

Helen laughed her low, contented laugh. "It is something to see that he's the nicest boy you know. That ought to give him comfort," she said slyly. "What else was hard for you to-day, Jeannie?"

"The day," said Jean promptly. "I don't know what; it was one of those crooked days. Everything was askew, and Dorcas has had one long witch spell from its beginning—the witchiest! I couldn't do a thing with her. She not only wouldn't help me, but she has been in more mischief than you'd believe even she could invent in one day. No wonder our blessed mother broke down! Dorcas alone was enough to have worn her out, and there are all the rest of us—and I, who might have helped her, was as blind as a chopping block to her weariness! When I think of it I'm glad I scalded that finger!"

"But she is getting better, and it is you who are giving her back her health, so you mustn't remember that you woke up slowly," said Helen quickly.

"I was wondering if you weren't going to include yourself among mother's trials," said a voice behind

them, and the girls faced around with a jump to see handsome Rodney in the hammock back of them, one foot on the floor, his arms over his head, as he held the hammock rope in both hands and lightly bounced himself as he swung.

"I included us all, Rod," said Jean. "All of us except Steve; I think he has never for a moment been anything but a help and comfort to mother."

"Steve runs along like a trolley car on a track," said Rod somewhat scornfully.

"And it's not a little thing to run steadily over a straight track day after day," said Jean emphatically.

"Steve isn't thirteen yet, but if he goes on all his life like the trolley car you call him, being so reliable, so upright, so sensible, he's going to be the best of the Wolcott family, Rodney, though you do flatter yourself you're more brilliant than he is. There's one thing; I can appreciate Steve if I am up in the clouds, as you always said I was. He's worth a dozen of you and me."

"Oh, Steve is one of the good boys!" said Rod with good-natured indifference. "He'll never set the world afire. I know a fellow that will, though. Steve the Steady isn't interesting, but this one is, and it isn't because he's older, either. I took to him from the start, and I guess he took to me. He says he is coming to see me. He's been around a lot. If you hang around

when he comes, Jean, you'll hear talk that is something different from the Tidewater brand."

"Who is he?" demanded Jean, swinging around on the step the better to see Rod, who also sat up and pulled down the belt that held his becoming flannel shirt in place. It was funny to see the would-be manliness struggling with the boyish importance of his fifteen years, as Rod tried to assume an air of equality with his new acquaintance as a man of the world. Plainly he was greatly flattered by this new friendship.

"His name is Anthony Dillon," said Rod with a swagger.

"That's what I thought! Why, Rod, that man must be twenty-six years old; he can't care about you. Why do you suppose he bothers with a boy like you? And he wanted to come here to board. I wonder what he is doing in Tidewater!" said Jean thoughtfully.

Before Rod, crimson with offended vanity, could reply Mr. Wolcott appeared in the doorway. His shoulders stooped slightly, there was a curious mixture of enthusiasm and dreamy aloofness in his handsome face. Rod was like him, but in addition to his youth Rod's face was full of eagerness and his eyes sparkled with a fire that had never flashed in his father's dreamy eyes at fifteen.

"Now, now, Jean daughter," Mr. Wolcott expos-

tulated gently, "you must not suspect your fellow man without reason. Ten years, or so, is not a discrepancy fatal to friendship. I find our Rodney quite interesting enough to account for this stranger's sudden fancy. If he is interesting, if he has new ideas to impart to us, Rodney, your friend will be most welcome to us all."

"He is mighty interesting, father—to me," said Rod, with his most manly air. "Probably he didn't spout poetry to Jean when he asked to come here to board. I guess he likes me all right. He'll be up 'most any night and I told him I'd take him out to the light some night, in the *Nixie*. He has enough new ideas, if that's all. Pretty important ones, I think. He's been telling me that we've got a lot of money tied up in this old place. He says that unless we are very wealthy, or very sentimental, he doesn't see why we live in this house, when a site like this, on the shore, is worth good money."

"What impertinence!" cried Jean, her eyes flashing. "That is precisely like the way he came and asked me to take him into this same old house to board! I should really like to know why he thinks the Wolcotts need his advice—or himself."

"The Wolcotts need money, Miss Jean," said Rod. "If you knew more about the world you'd know that men who see a good thing and are up to something in

a business way are ready to give another fellow points. Tony Dillon told me himself that he hated to see such an opportunity go to waste, even if it didn't affect him. He saw I'd have the wit to catch on when he pointed it out to me."

"*Tony Dillon!*" cried Jean, with an underscore mark in her voice. "Did he tell you to call him by a nickname? Rod, I haven't seen much of the world, nor of business men, but I didn't like that man, and I don't trust him. How queer it is for him to jump into intimacy and give advice about our affairs—to a boy like you!"

Mr. Wolcott spoke in his mild voice, forestalling Rod's angry retort. "We are not reduced to selling our home, my boy, and we need no more money than we have," he said. "But if we did need more we should still live calmly on in our old house, knowing that when I have perfected my steering apparatus for air-ships—it is bound to succeed, children! I have lived too long by the sea, and my fathers have lived by it too long before me, not to understand the currents of the winds and what shall rule them. When this steering apparatus is perfected we shall be wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice, beyond the riches of the freighted galleons which that hungry Atlantic has swallowed up."

Rod made a sound that suggested filial irreverence,

but Jean spread her tired hands on her knees and looked sadly out on the ocean over which the moon was rising, nearly full. It seemed to her that the Wolcotts could easily use more wealth than they had, and her father's dreams oppressed her. They were like a mirage; they would never lead to the haven, of that she was convinced. The light out beyond on the rocks flashed into being, flickered, grew, sent out a long, broad stream of light, diminished and disappeared. It was like that, Jean thought, these hopes of her gentle, visionary father. The steering apparatus for air-ships would never guide home the Wolcotts' treasure ships.

"Well, sir, you'll see Mr. Dillon before many moons; he's likely to turn up any time, and you'll see if he isn't just what I say he is; maybe you'll be interested in what he has to say," Rod was saying, when a shrill shout, half frightened, half triumphant, wholly mischievous, rang out and Jean sprang to her feet.

"Now what has Dorcas done?" she cried. "I ought not to have left her to herself, not in the mood she's been in all day, but I was so tired! Dorcas, Dorcas, where are you?"

"Look for me!" cried the voice shrilly, but Jean had no time to obey; for Steve came out, book in hand, as usual, and enlightened her.

"Dorcas is out on the bowsprit, Jean. Rod, come see if you can get her down," he said.

"Out on the bowsprit!" echoed Jean, pale to her lips, while Rod dashed over the porch-rail with an angry exclamation.

They all flew around the house and stood looking up. Some bygone Wolcott, stranded ashore after a seafaring life, had rigged out on the side of the house a bowsprit and a figurehead from a derelict of distant seas. It stood out under the eaves like a gargoyle, fantastically companionable, though entirely inaccessible to all the succeeding Wolcott children who had played under its shadow. Now Dorcas, small and elfin, with her black eyes snapping in the half-light, sat out on this bowsprit, upon which she had lowered herself from a perilous attic slant, singing, like a witch on a broomstick, at the top of her shrill voice.

"Dorcas, how could you!" cried Jean, terror-stricken, yet indignant.

"My dear, can you get down safely?" asked Dorcas' mild father.

"You'll have to get a ladder, Rod; you'll have to get a ladder! You can't get me down without a ladder," cried Dorcas gleefully.

"Not on your life!" growled Rod. "If you got yourself into such a scrape you'd better get out of it

the same way. Can you crawl back? No ladder would reach you anyway."

"No, sir; I can't crawl back," cried Dorcas. "Then call out the fire department! I hoped our ladder would be too short! Call out the fire department! My, what fun!"

"You crawl back, miss," ordered Rodney, while Jean, trembling, moaned:

"No, no, Rod, how could she? Don't try, Dorcas! Oh, Dorcas, Dorcas, why have you done this?"

"Because I wanted to be a gargoyle, Jean. I couldn't crawl back, Rod. It was easy enough to get out here, but I couldn't turn around, and I can't hitch backward. Do, please, call out the fire department. Call all the Tidewater firemen," shrieked Dorcas, waving her arms in ecstasy while she held on to the bowsprit with her knees and Jean and Helen covered their eyes, cowering low from the sight of the witch-child's instantaneous destruction.

Just then Steve came back dragging a mattress. It was one from his own single bed, and, as he gravely spread it underneath the bowsprit, it looked not much wider than Dorcas' perch.

"I'm sorry it is so narrow," Steve panted apologetically, "but I couldn't handle a full-sized one. If Dorcas can drop straight down she'll land on it."

Jean laughed hysterically. "Rod, we must do something," she began, but, before she could suggest what the something should be, Mr. Dillon appeared on the scene.

"Is there an eclipse to-night, or are all you good people star-gazing?" he asked. "Has there 'a new planet swum into your ken'?"

Jean turned with a swift surprise and pleasure that, characteristically, made her forget Dorcas' plight for an instant.

"Why, that's Keats!" she cried, involuntarily relenting to the repellent stranger who knew the poet. "No, indeed, we are not star-gazing. My little sister has crawled out on that bowsprit on the side of the house and we are wondering how to rescue her."

"A bowsprit on the side of the house?" echoed Mr. Dillon, looking up. "By all that's wonderful! This is a quaintly attractive old mansion. I wish I could paint that extraordinary efflorescence of its wall, with that eerie little figure clinging to it! But perhaps you would rather I would get her down than paint her?"

"Oh, do you think you could?" cried Jean.

"Either one," laughed Mr. Dillon. "I was not a bad athlete in college and that isn't much of a feat. May I go up through the house and get out on the bowsprit the way that child did? It will bear, of course?"

"It may be rotted," hesitated Jean, but her father said :

"Nonsense, Jean ! That timber is made for worse weather and greater strain than it has endured for the seventy odd years it has faced the Atlantic on our wall. I shall be grateful if you will rescue that reckless child," he added to Mr. Dillon. "Are you my boy Rodney's new friend ?"

"Yes, sir. I will be introduced after I have caught that young gull of yours," laughed Anthony Dillon, responding to Rodney's caressing slap on the shoulder by putting an arm across the boy's shoulder and following his lead into the house.

In a few moments he appeared, cautiously sliding down the roof slant and working his way out to Dorcas. He lay on the bowsprit at full length, winding around it his stocking-clad feet from which he had discarded his shoes, holding himself with one hand. Then with the other hand he seized Dorcas, considerably subdued and frightened now, firmly by the arm. With no little difficulty he persuaded her to trust herself to that hand, while Jean and Helen hid their eyes. When Dorcas at last let go her clinging hold of the bowsprit Anthony Dillon lowered her, shrieking with fright and struggling wildly, into her father's waiting arms. Then he crawled backward to the house, crept up the slip-

pery shingles and reappeared, smiling and careless, among the group below.

Rod went wild with enthusiasm over the performance. Mr. Wolcott was hardly less enthusiastic. Steve soberly accorded the stranger an equal admiration. Helen with difficulty kept her enthusiasm within the bounds of convention and Jean could not well withhold a cordiality toward Dorcas' rescuer which, even then, she gave reluctantly. But Dorcas, and his acquaintance with Keats combined, were strong credentials for the newcomer. Jean felt that she was unjust and exerted herself to make a visit pleasant which had begun so unusually.

Dorcas went to bed in disgrace; her escapade had not turned her into the heroine she had expected to appear. The rest of the family disposed themselves on the porch to enjoy the moonlight on the ocean.

"Your son, this jolly young chum of mine," began Anthony Dillon, turning to Mr. Wolcott, "tells me that you are perfecting an era-making invention. May I hear about it? I'm awfully interested in aeronautics and aeronauts; have been since I was a boy,—though then I used to call them argonauts."

"Did you?" cried Rod delighted. "Honest truth, I don't believe it's two years since I thought the argonauts were—were—oh, the other ones."

“Go slow, Rod ; you haven’t got your bearings yet !” laughed Anthony Dillon.

“I’ll gladly explain my ideas to you, Mr. Dillon,” said Mr. Wolcott eagerly. “I rarely find a sympathetic listener. I mean, first of all, to confer an incalculable benefit upon the race, but, incidentally, I shall make the fortune of my family.”

“As to that,” said Dillon, with a little laugh and a slight shake of the head, “permit me to doubt, Mr. Wolcott. No great invention, at least none that is as epoch-making as I suppose yours to be, often makes a fortune for its inventor. You must work for higher ends than that. If it is a question of fortune-making I think I can be of more use to you than the invention. I have come down here with an idea in my pocket that would be worth thousands to a man situated as you are here.” He waved a hand lightly toward the sea. “But I’m not here to divulge my schemes till I have found the right man to talk to about them. In the meantime, may I hear about the great air rudder ?”

Mr. Wolcott turned to him with his childlike smile irradiating his face and launched into a description of his absorbing invention. Loving it as one of his own children, it was plain that his love for it overflowed upon this young man, who was identifying himself with the inventor, listening with respectful attention and with

either genuine or well-feigned enthusiasm to the details Mr. Wolcott eagerly poured forth.

Jean's heart sank ; her distrust returned with increase. The hint of Anthony Dillon's having come to Tidewater with a money-making scheme in mind aroused it, strengthened it. Jean was very young, a dreamer, too, but her instincts were quick and accurate ; she felt people, rarely with a wrong feeling for their qualities. How easily this man had won Rod, partly through the boy's vanity, partly through an honest boyish admiration which his charm had awakened ! And quite as easily he could win her simple-hearted father, steer himself straight into his innermost regard by the power of the new invention.

Jean " wished that he wouldn't ; " over and over she restlessly said to herself, listening to the steady flow of talk, watching the delightful manners of the stranger toward her father : " I wish he wouldn't, oh, I wish he wouldn't ! "

To add to her discomfort Roger Cathcart came down the street, plainly coming to join the Wolcotts on the porch. He saw Anthony Dillon there and went on, raising his hat, but not pausing.

And just as he passed Anthony Dillon interrupted the conversation long enough to lean toward Jean, with his winning smile and say : " When is the pretty lady

of the house going to break her silence? *Guernsey's Magazine* came to-day with a lovely poem of hers in it. I wish she would help us talk over the great invention that is to control the winds on which her fancy wrought, as no machine can, in that poem, 'The Racing Waves.'"

There was small comfort to Jean in knowing that this over-elaborate flattery made her answer, like a sulky child: "I don't know a thing about machinery and that isn't poetry, only rhymes."

For Roger had seen Anthony Dillon's honeyed smile and had gone on with a bow. He probably thought that Jean was letting Dillon "get around her" as he had Rod, and this after her avowed distrust of him!

"I wish we had thought of cutting down the bowsprit!" she said to herself, vindictively. "I wonder what he means by coming here and being butter-smooth and useful, anyway!"

CHAPTER VII

JEAN'S PRESENT

JEAN sang about her morning tasks. There were several reasons for singing. One was that she had learned to perform these tasks with greater ease and better results. Another reason was that Dorcas was subdued—that is subdued for Dorcas !—since her adventure on the bowsprit, and was helpful as Dorcas could be when her activity turned to something other than pranks. But the best of the reasons was that the day before a letter had come from the dear mother on the brow of Mount Horsford telling Jean such good news that all the face of the earth and the sea was transfigured and transformed by it.

“I am worlds better,” Mrs. Wolcott wrote. “The doctor here says that our own Dr. Blaisdell and the specialist made a mistake natural to have been made when I was so exhausted as I was when I left home : there is no established disease. He says that I shall go home sooner than we dared hope I might, and go home sound and well, owing to the rest and treatment which

my dear, brave, devoted girl is making possible for me. I am living out-of-doors in the sunshine and dry mountain air and feeling life flow back to my veins hour by hour."

Jean carried this letter in her bosom. Her song sprang from it as from a fountain of unutterable joy.

Besides all this it was June, June on shore with birds in full song, and with fresh verdure and hurrying, thronging blossoms ; June out over the sea, lying shining in blue and green and white rippling laughter, spread out under the full June of the cloudless sky above it.

These were reasons enough for singing, and Jean sang happily from kitchen to pantry and back again, stepping out-of-doors for a moment occasionally to get more intimately into it all and to interrupt Funny and Penny in their game of hide-and-seek around a syringa bush, by squeezing first one then the other, impartially. No one could have guessed that this was Jean, the pale poet of two months ago, who had passed her days on her sofa, vaguely dreaming in rhymes of Life and Duty in the abstract, but with no part in the actualities of either.

Yet—and here was still another reason for singing—the day before Jean had managed to finish a little story which her own judgment, as well as Helen's enthu-

siasm, told her was the best, most promising bit of writing that she had ever done. Was it possible that her sacrifice of herself was to awaken in her, and give into her hands for her reward a new self, her best, cleverest self? That as she grew more womanly, more self-forgetful, her talent would strengthen? If that were so, then Roger was not such a dull boy after all; he would have been right all along!

Ah, Roger! The thought of him checked the song. He rarely came to see Jean now that Anthony Dillon had become, as he had become, a frequent visitor to the old Wolcott house. Jean knew that Roger thought that she, as well as Rod, had adopted the young man as a friend. Well, if Roger wanted to "think things," Jean did not care, so she told herself. There was no reason why she should not alter her mind about Mr. Dillon if she found that she had been mistaken, but the truth was she had done anything but alter her mind: she was almost ashamed to dislike him so heartily without better ground for doing so. In any case, he was much too old to be her friend; ten years older than she was! She was only a year older than Rod, and if Mr. Dillon were too old to be Rod's friend, he was too old to be hers.

Jean told herself again that she did not care; "if Roger Cathcart wanted to be silly let him!" But we

do not have to announce our indifference loudly to ourselves ; when we do thus announce it it is rarely indifference, and, somehow, Jean's song ceased when she remembered that Roger was not neighborly now. Of course, if one has been friendly to a person from Third Reader days, she cannot be wholly indifferent to the temperature of that friendship's thermometer. It is nicer to have it go up than to have it drop to frostiness, say what one will.

But the day was June's perfection and Jean's song welled up again from that warming letter next her heart after scarcely five minutes devoted to Roger's mood. She was singing at the top of her silvery young voice when Mrs. Claudia Wolcott came in at the side door, trying to veil the pleasure in her eyes at finding the once dreamy Jean busy, and singing about her tasks.

"Good-morning, Jean," she said. And Jean faced about with a surprised jump and waved her broom in greeting before she had time to recall that Mrs. Claudia was always treated with respectful deference. However, the salutation plainly did not displease her. "Is that a strawberry shortcake? Who taught you to make it?" demanded Mrs. Wolcott, surveying with undisguised approval a model shortcake, cooling and scenting the air on a side table.

"Mrs. Cathcart," replied Jean. "I'm so proud of

that cake, Step-grand, dear, that I can feel myself swelling, just as it did in the oven, every time I look at it! When I get into straits that I can't work my way out of I run over to Mrs. Cathcart—or else to Helen Lumley's—and get pulled out. Mrs. Cathcart has been just as good as she can be; there's nobody like Mrs. Cathcart!"

"Well, nobody else is Roger Cathcart's mother!" retorted Mrs. Claudia dryly, but with a twinkle that made Jean laugh, though she was provoked to feel her own furious blush. "Now, never mind, child! Of course I know that has nothing to do with your appreciation of Mrs. Cathcart; 'you love her for herself, not because of that rather fine boy of hers!' I know! Mrs. Cathcart is a good woman but there are other good women. I am going to see one now, stopped in on my way, and that is old Betsy Drummond. If I am half as good as she is when I'm deaf, and nearly blind, and more than half crippled by rheumatism, I shall be as surprised as I am thankful. Though I'd have to have some one tell me if it was so; old Betsy has no suspicion that she is one of the best reasons an angel could find for sparing the Tidewaters, if they were to be destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah. 'I must go right along. The reason I came in was to tell you that you were to have a Fourth of July present.'"

“ A Fourth of — I never heard of giving presents on that day! Why, Step-grand ? ” asked Jean.

“ Why what ? Why haven't you heard of Fourth of July presents ? Or why am I giving you one ? Because it is too long to wait for either Christmas or your birthday, and the Fourth of July happens to be the day you need this particular gift. In fact you need it then so much that you have to have it before ; it is coming to-night,” said Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, plainly enjoying Jean's wonder, for she was not a person who gave many presents.

“ It's exciting, Step-grand,” said Jean. “ I'm grateful, but I'm so curious I can't feel it ! Won't you tell me about it ? ”

Mrs. Wolcott laughed ; she liked Jean's queer little ways of expressing herself. “ I'm not going to tell you much. It's something useful, very useful. I have decided that you have proved yourself and should not be allowed to overdo it. You've been a good girl, Jean, a brave, unselfish, uncomplaining girl, and I'm proud of you.”

“ Why, Step-grand ! ” cried Jean, her eyes filling with happy tears, for nothing could have been more unexpected than this commendation from this source. “ I'm — I'm grateful for that, anyway ! ”

“ It's easy enough to set out with fine resolutions,”

nodded Mrs. Wolcott. "But it's another thing to persevere. I should have expected you to leap to save your mother, and take hold of almost anything, rather than let her die. But housework is not inspiring; it's dull, tiresome repetition, and you never had done much of it. I am delighted with the way you've persisted, and not flagged when the first enthusiasm was over, and I especially like the way you've kept on, uncomplainingly; I'm not fond of a whiner. So I'm going to give you a present. It will spare you hard work and heal your hands." She glanced at Jean's roughened hands with a look so full of sympathetic understanding of what the sacrifice of their pretty whiteness meant to a girl, that Jean felt as if she had never seen her "Step-grand" before. "If you don't want the gift after your mother comes home, you may send it to some one else, but I'd like to have you keep it," added Mrs. Wolcott.

"No fear of my not keeping anything you give me so beautifully, dear Step-grand!" cried Jean. "I'd love it, if only that you gave it to me because you thought I had not quite failed. I've been awfully discouraged sometimes. But I thought I'd better not think I was! I've found out there's a lot in treating yourself like company, and not pretending to see the mistakes you make. I make believe, or I couldn't get on. When I'm tired to death I make myself dance, then I know I

can't be tired, or else I wouldn't be likely to dance all alone in the kitchen ! And when I make horrid, awkward, foolish blunders I make believe I am just acting the part of an awkward green maid ! And when I get so blue I'm perfectly soaked in indigo—only I'm never like that, now mother is really better !—I sing and whistle a little jingle I made up. It isn't a great poem, but it does me good, and the tune is just a happy little up and down tune. There's a four line chorus ; like this :

“ Come, now, Polly, Polly, Polly,
It is folly, folly, folly,
To pretend you're melancholy,
When all's jolly, jolly, jolly.

Isn't that ridiculous ? But you'd be surprised to see how it held me up—like a life-preserver ! ” Jean amazed herself by pouring out this confidence to her formidable step-grandmother, but the warmth in her eyes led the girl on ; she was conscious of a degree of sympathy and affection toward her in Mrs. Wolcott that was as delightful as it was astonishing.

“ As long as you're buoyed up, Jean, it doesn't matter what does it—doggerel or doughnuts ! And life-preservers are very like doughnuts,” said Mrs. Wolcott. “ You'll get my present to-night. Now I must go ; it

is a long walk to old Betsy's and the sun is warm. I met Rod down the street and he said you had still better news of your mother yesterday. That's fine ! By the way, Jean, I don't admire that beautiful young person who was with Rodney. He looks as though he considered himself the earth's axis. Selfish and scheming face."

"I don't like him either, Step-grand, dear," said Jean. "I feel ashamed to dislike him as I do, sometimes. I don't trust him one bit ! Yet he seems very kind. Father likes him as much as Rod does ; he is interested in everything father talks about, and father does so enjoy having him to talk to ! I ought to like him for being so good as to let father tell him about inventions for hours. I wonder why we like some people and dislike others without a scrap of reason ?"

"Pity if we hadn't a little of the instinct that the dumb creatures have !" said Mrs. Wolcott. "I wouldn't trust that young pink of perfection under the searchlight of a war-ship ! Jean, if you want me at any time, for anything, if it's within my power, I hope you'd call on your queer old step-grandmother as soon as you would on Mrs. Cathcart or the Lumleys ?"

"Thank you, dear Step-grand ; of course I would. I always know that you are back of me. It must be a great deal the way the early settlers felt conscious of

the block-house when they were fighting the Indians in the fields," said Jean.

Mrs. Claudia Wolcott departed with a slight smile on her lips and profound satisfaction in her heart. It was a lonely heart, as most solitary elderly ones are, and lacking all near kin of her own, she cherished her step-son's children more tenderly than her crusty ways had led them to suspect. And of them all, Jean and Steve were dearest to her. It had been a real distress to her, competent and wise as she was, to see Jean growing up aloof from service to others, impractical, selfishly engrossed. She rejoiced with loving pride in the triumph of the girl over all the habits of her life.

"The Wolcotts have a lot in them, or I never should have married one of them," thought Mrs. Wolcott, as she went briskly down the quiet Tidewater street. "If that child adds sense to her talents—well, Mary and Bentley may be proud of their daughter Jean!" And she smiled broadly now, there being no one to see, though the smile made a little dog, lying on the lower step of a house she was passing, wag his tail in lazy acknowledgment, thinking the smile was for him.

"What is it going to be, Jean? What should you think it would be going to be?" asked Dorcas, for the unnumbered time. She was greatly excited by the prospect of Jean's present from their "Step-grand."

“Sometimes I think it is jewelry, then I think maybe it is a carpet sweeper, or something like that. Once in a while I think maybe it’s a stock.”

“A stock? To wear?” asked Jean.

“No. A stock; you know! The stock you buy and get money from, once in a while, like a bank. I thought maybe she might give you one stock to be your very own, so you could spend what it paid you for candy, or books, or whatever you wanted to,” explained Dorcas.

Rodney, sitting on the porch after tea with his family, uttered a whoop.

“What a kid you are, D.!” he laughed. “Always coming out with something nobody would suspect you of knowing about, and then not knowing it right. You don’t own *a* stock; you own stocks, or else a share in stocks. Jolly, I wish we did! If Tony gets his scheme going—but that’s not for publication now. No fear that Step-grand is giving Jean stocks! Maybe it’s rubber gloves; she said it would heal your hands, didn’t she, Jean?”

“That might be cold cream, or a vacuum cleaner,” remarked Steve. “No good guessing.”

“Where’s father?” asked Jean, suddenly discovering his absence. She was patting Dorcas’ shoulder soothingly, for Rod’s ridicule had ruffled the feathers of their youngest.

“He took Old King Cole and drove Anthony Dillon along the shore,” said Rod, with ill-concealed satisfaction. “Tony wanted to have father show him some things—and I guess he can show father a thing or two ! They started about twenty minutes ago.”

“How’s your present coming ?” demanded Dorcas, emerging from under her cloud, which had transferred itself to Jean’s brow as she heard, with the vague fear with which similar information always filled her, that her father was yielding to Mr. Dillon’s charm.

“I have no idea : I suppose Step-grand will send it down by Ellen, or by Herman. How queer that girl is out there ! I don’t know her, either. I thought at first she was coming here, but now ——”

“She’s not coming here, nor going there,” Rodney finished her sentence for her. “She doesn’t act as though she had all her buttons.”

“She acts as though she was looking for them, then,” said Dorcas. “I’ve been watching her. You don’t think she could be a burglar’s wife, coming ahead of him, to hide and let him in after it’s dark, do you ? Or some one got away from an insane asylum ?” she added in an awful whisper.

“Well, for pity’s sake, Dorcas Wolcott !” laughed Jean. “One would think you’d been reading the trashiest stories, instead of the nicest books there are for

small girls! She looks quiet and perfectly safe, but she does act strangely. Now she's decided to come on."

The person they were discussing came on rapidly toward them, now that she had made her decision. She was neatly, but curiously attired in garments of various dates, her figure was squat and strong, her face ruddy and pleasant; she was plainly a new arrival in Tidewater.

"Good-evening," she said, when she was within hailing distance of the group on the Wolcott porch. "Is this the place?"

"Yes," said Rod, with perfect gravity. "Yes, this is it."

"Do you mean Mr. Wolcott's house?" asked Jean, choking slightly and giving Rod a reproachful glance, as Dorcas sputtered into a cough and a laugh.

"Yes, miss, that's what I mean," returned the newcomer. "Old Mrs. Wolcott—only she's none so old, neither—she sent me down here. She says I'm your July fifth gift—I suppose it's your birthday too soon."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Rod and all four of the Wolcotts laughed; it was impossible to help it.

"No, sir; I'm Welsh, or my people is. I was born there, but I was taken away from the very first and brought to England, and I crossed to this country two years ago," explained Jean's "gift." "I can do house-

work so well you'd never believe, and I was looking for a place. Mrs. Wolcott had me sent to her by a friend she knows in Hingham—that's where I was—and she's sent me here for a July fifth gift to Miss Jean Wolcott, she said, who is her granddaughter by her marriage with her grandfather."

"She'll be the death of me," murmured Rod, really quite purple in his effort to keep back the laughter which Steve was enjoying inwardly. Steve had a faculty of laughing his fill without uttering a sound and it served well in such cases as this.

Dorcas had stopped laughing to sit up and regard this girl with growing wonder.

Jean, crimson to her hair, asked, with a quavering voice: "Didn't Mrs. Wolcott say a Fourth of July gift?"

"Right you are, miss!" cried the girl, apparently as surprised as she was pleased to recognize the fact. "I might have remembered, on account of the fire-crackers and general noises. Am I to come in, please?"

Jean sprang to her feet, realizing her duty. "Indeed you are, and I'm very glad to see you. I—I never guessed my present was to be like this. Mrs. Wolcott said she was going to send me a present."

"And my name," observed the singular "gift," with

a slight indication of her funny little curtsy, "is Winifred Thomas, which I am called Winnie by everybody that I know. If I might go to my room, miss? There wouldn't be much more to do to-night, I fancy? And I shall be getting up somewhere about four, so sleep one must, on one side of the clock or the other."

"Quite true, Winnie," replied Jean, with difficulty, as Rod murmured for her ear alone:

"You don't think she means one side of the bed or the other, do you?"

"I'll show you your room, though it isn't made ready for you, because I didn't know you were coming," Jean continued, leading the way into the house. "But to-morrow we will arrange the room expressly for you. Don't get up at four, Winnie. There won't be anything to do so early; none of us will be up."

"My room, miss, will be perfectly good, whatever way it is; I am humble-minded and strong in my body, so I rests content and sleeps, wherever and whatever. But as to the early start, miss, you must please let me have my way. I shall find plenty to do and no need of you to show me. I'll be learning my closets and pans till you come down to show me the breakfast the first morning, but never again, miss, never again, will that be needed by Winnie Thomas, for once showing is shown, says I. And I am not long

in this world, being twenty years old come Michaelmas week, which is just the time a goose would be best born, my late droll father used often tell me, and I know well, however good meaning, there's a lot to be done, where a young lady has taken care of a house without experience."

Jean and her "gift" disappeared, leaving the others convulsed by Winnie's departing speech, which floated back to them as she followed Jean up the stairs.

"Well, sir, if I ever!" exclaimed Steve fervently.

"Isn't she funny!" cried Dorcas, so impressed by the singularity of the new maiden that she no longer felt like laughing at her.

"Step-grand Claudia is just as funny to fool us this way," said Rod. "The girl's a corker. But it's a good thing for Jean; I'll bet she is tired enough, if she'd own up."

"Who'd ever have guessed that present!" sighed Dorcas, not knowing whether to be pleased or a little disappointed.

CHAPTER VIII

JEAN'S HOLIDAY

WINNIE THOMAS had declared truly that for her "once showing is shown." Jean found herself at the end of three days feeling, as she herself said, "as though Bunker Hill monument had stooped down to take her up in the air, high above worry, yet on the firmest of pedestals." After a week Winnie had made herself indispensable, and Jean was reveling in the care of her household, without the drudgery of housework.

"I'm almost too comfortable, you dear, kind Step-grand," she said, thanking the donor of her "gift" all over again. "I feel guilty, as if I were shirking—but, oh, it is so heavenly good to put on a fresh frock in the morning and find it still clean and unspotted from the world in the afternoon!"

"It's one thing to shirk and another to take the good things that are sent us in the spirit with which they offer themselves," returned Mrs. Claudia Wolcott.

"Well, there's no doubt that Winnie Thomas is a good thing!" said Jean. "And the best of her

is that she takes us all as a sort of mission; I think she feels that we are the real answer in the catechism to 'Why were you created?'"

"Jean, child, you are growing up!" exclaimed Mrs. Wolcott, though Jean did not see the connection, until she added: "Your remarks have put on long dresses and done up their hair. Did you know that people's minds put on grown-up clothing, as well as their bodies? It is shown by the way they express their ideas."

Jean laughed. "I know one way in which I have grown up," she said. "I appreciate the funny little things you say much more than I did."

"What are you going to do to-morrow? And why do you get up to leave me so soon?" asked Mrs. Wolcott.

"I must go home, Step-grand, dear," said Jean, who had hurried up to the elder Mrs. Wolcott's that morning on a hasty errand. "Winnie does not set me entirely free; I still have lots and lots to do, and the mending! Dorcas tears her clothes like a paper doll—only I can't mend them with mucilage. Step-grand, dear, I do just naturally despise mending!"

"Common complaint, step-granddaughter, dear! What did you tell me you were to do on the Fourth—to-morrow?" suggested Mrs. Wolcott.

“I didn’t tell you, did I? Father and I are going over to West Tidewater in the morning; there’s a man over there who has a new seed-corn that father wants to try. It comes up in a jiffy and bears, I wouldn’t dare say how many ears to a stalk! And is so sweet and tender and milky that it is fed to the youngest babies. That isn’t precisely what the circular said which this man sent father, but never mind. It is wonderful corn, so we are going to get some seed to put in that corner of the garden where dear daddy tried the hybrid pea-bean last year—you remember?”

Jean laughed and her step-grandmother laughed with her.

“It wouldn’t be Bentley Wolcott if he didn’t try the marvelous corn! Such a ridiculous story as that agent told of that cross between a pea and a bean! Yet Bentley believed him and planted it at no one knows how much a packet for the seeds!” sighed Mrs. Wolcott.

“I know, and they came up the most ordinary hard peas!” laughed Jean. “But sometimes I think, Step-grand, that father gets more than vegetables out of his hopes in his garden. Nobody else is as happy as he is, in spite of backache, when he plants it. Well, in any case, we are going after a sort of corn miracle at West Tidewater in the morning. In the evening all the

young folks are going to bring their fireworks and firecrackers over to our house and set them off, right in England's face, on the ocean side of the house. Then I guess she'll be sorry she let her stupid German king drive the colonies to independence almost a hundred and forty years ago ! ”

“ I don't know. Perhaps she will be glad she is rid of such a noisy pack of youngsters, when she hears those firecrackers in the rear of the Boston lower light ! ” retorted Mrs. Wolcott. “ Good-bye, Jean ; come as often as you can ; invent errands. I do believe I gave you Winnie as a present because I wanted you to get time to come to see me. I am only just seeing through my own motives. I tell you, my dear, it is hard for a mere mortal to be purely noble.”

Jean ran off, laughing happily. There was something cheering about the elder Mrs. Wolcott's betrayal of affection for Jean. The girl had grown up in an atmosphere of adoring love, a love that she knew would be hers, whether she earned it or not. But her step-grandmother would not be especially fond of her as she grew older, unless she performed that feat in a way of which Mrs. Claudia Wolcott could approve. So Jean felt elated by the proof that she was earning affection from this source.

The Fourth of July that year dawned and developed

as a typical Fourth. There was a morning of pink and blue and lilac and golden splendors, with a breeze that set the Crimson Ramblers, which rioted over the gray end of the old Wolcott house, swinging and nodding in it.

Not many hours after that dawn had expanded into cloudless sunshine in the east, with feathery breeze clouds, capable of whipping up showers by night in the west, Mr. Wolcott welcomed Jean, in her pretty blue lawn, to his side in the unlevel seat of the old phaeton, and suggested gently to Old King Cole that, if he were not averse to doing so, he might set forth. King Cole moved deliberately away, took up the steady jog trot with which he managed to perform his tasks at the least inconvenience to himself, and the expedition was begun.

Mr. Wolcott was not prone to talk; he best enjoyed companionship that exacted little of him, unless it chanced to be of that rare variety which felt, or feigned, an interest in his absorbing passion, an understanding of his dearest dreams. Of his four children Jean was the most like him, in spite of the practical side that she had lately proved hers, and with Jean her father was happiest. Now she did not interrupt his thoughts with chatter, but left him to guide King Cole—who always seemed to be a horse exactly in sympathy with his

master—slowly along the quiet streets in silence, singing softly to herself, as she had long ago found out that her father loved to hear her.

“Jean, child,” said Mr. Wolcott, unexpectedly breaking into this quiet accord, “you are a good girl, my dear.”

“Thank you, daddy mine,” said Jean surprised. Then she added, dimpling: “Though you know they say that when a girl is dull, and plain, and there isn’t anything else nice to say of her, people call her ‘a good girl.’ ”

“You are quite pretty enough for me, daughter, and we have never considered you dull, but you are a good girl,” persisted Mr. Wolcott. “I wanted you to know that I have noticed how comfortable I was. As a rule,” he added candidly, “when I am comfortable I do not notice it; only when something is lacking, I fear, do I take note of my surroundings. But I have noticed how well you have taken care of all of us since your mother went away, and—you are a good girl, Jean.”

“Why, little father,” cried Jean touched, “it isn’t good in me to keep house, though it would have been bad in me not to. You don’t know how glad I am you have been comfortable. I begin to think I’d rather be a good daughter Jean, than the great writer Jean Wolcott I wanted to be.”

“Yes, yes ; I know that feeling,” nodded Mr. Wolcott emphatically. “Jean, I am afraid that what I said just now was only too true—that I don’t notice when I am comfortable, you know. I have been wondering if your mother has not missed my gratitude, my appreciation ? You see, my dear, it must be hard for a woman to go on day after day, year after year, without spoken appreciation of her work. It isn’t like a man ; if my work isn’t understood now, it does not matter. I am working for posterity ; I know that, when my visions are realities, my name will go down garlanded with grateful praise. But a woman works only for her loved ones, to make possible her husband’s fame. I fear your mother may have missed the gratitude I ought to show her. I feel it, Jean, I feel it ! I know what self-forgetfulness, what loveliness is the entire fibre of your mother’s being, but I don’t say so enough, I don’t show the knowledge, Jean. When she comes back I mean to do better.”

“Little father,” said Jean, once more using her childish pet name for the tall man beside her, her eyes glistening as she looked at him with tears on her lashes, “you are such a dear little Bentley Wolcott-boy ! Mother understands, I’m sure of that. She loves you so dearly that she can’t miss anything in you. When you love any one very much you love them just as they

are, don't you ? And their ways must be right to you. Besides, mother loves you like a mother, too ; she loves to take care of you. I imagine it is her reward just to do what she does every day, and to know that it keeps you comfortable and lets you work on your inventions."

Jean's father turned and looked at her. "That little elucidation proves that you know how women love their dear ones ; Jeannie, you are growing up," he said.

"That's what Step-grand told me yesterday," laughed Jean. "I suppose when a girl is past sixteen she is getting glimpses of the way ahead of her. I feel as though I had grown older since mother went away. Oh, father dear, you talk of not telling mother that you know exactly how wonderful she is, but how do you suppose I feel when I remember that I let her overdo and never saw how she needed my help, not any more than if I had been a stone idol—instead of selfish idle !" And, in spite of her real contrition, Jean laughed a little at her small jest.

"There is something else that I have thought a great deal about of late, Jean," said Mr. Wolcott, with a hesitancy that was almost timid. "And that is money."

"Money ! Father, of all things the very last you would be likely to think of !" cried Jean.

"Ah, that is it, my dear !" exclaimed her father. "You see most men do think of it, do make wealth for

their families. But I—do not. I am afraid your mother has been a good deal put about by this. It is all very well for me—again, I am working for posterity, not for gain—but for her! She must often have to manage and plan to bring up you children, because I am not like other men. I think, perhaps, it is my duty to arouse myself.”

“Father,” cried Jean, with a stab of the apprehension that she felt so often of late, “we do not need any more than we have. If it ever was hard for mother, it was when we were small; now it is easier, and soon the boys, and I hope the elder girl, will be helpful to you. I don’t care one bit about money.”

“You are too young to know what it means, my dear, besides being your father’s own child; I never should be able to see its importance,” returned Mr. Wolcott. “But if I can make an inheritance for you, a greater one, I ought to do it, and very possibly Dorcas will care more for the things of this world than you do; I think Rodney already does.”

“No, no, father; you must not imagine we are not all perfectly well off as we are,” said Jean. “I think—I feel sure—mother would rather have everything unchanged. Don’t you know she is glad that we have the inheritance of our old name, honorable among these who founded the Tidewaters and helped to found the

nation? And the inheritance, of that dear old home of ours, without too much money to clog our steps? Don't you remember mother always says it is good to have just the start we have and to be obliged to get the rest for ourselves?"

"As to that, my dear Jean, I suppose we could turn our home to greater advantage than to hold it generation after generation," said Mr. Wolcott, with manifest reluctance.

"No, oh, no, we never, never could!" cried Jean. "Father dear, don't you know that if you are working for posterity, as you say, if your invention succeeds, then we shall be the first of posterity to get profit out of it? Why do you feel dissatisfied when you are sure it will succeed? For then won't you have done enough for us?"

Jean felt half ashamed to appeal to this faith of her father's in his air rudder, for none of his family believed it would ever prove more than a mirage, but she was frightened by this first hint of a clue to the actual ground for the fears that of late had been vaguely haunting her.

Mr. Wolcott turned to Jean with the sweet smile that made his face beautiful at times.

"Isn't it ridiculous for such an impractical pair as we are, Jeannie, to discuss business and money getting?"

We would be better employed enjoying a morning that seems to justify us in finding wealth in other things than money," he said.

"Ah, yes, fatherums! And you and I are rich anyway!" Jean eagerly assented. "What a nice little poem that would make!"

"We are never awake long, Jean," laughed Mr. Wolcott with a rare perception of the tendency in them both to drop into poetry, and out of workaday themes.

So after this there was no more talk of realities, nor much talk of any sort, but a long and peaceful jogging through the country road that connected the two Tidewaters; Jean singing softly, her father meditating, both seeing every bird that flew, hearing every song from tree and shrub, feeling every caressing breeze, and both perfectly happy, while Old King Cole philosophized to the even beat of his hoofs in common time.

When they came back it was nearly noon and Mr. Wolcott was in high delight because beneath the phaeton seat reposed two quarts of the marvelous corn which sprouted sooner, grew faster, bore larger and more ears to the stalk, as well as tenderer and sweeter ones, than any other corn under cultivation—Mr. Wolcott knew this to be so because the West Tidewater man selling it had told him so! Jean had remonstrated on buying

such a quantity for a patch of ground twelve feet square, the space given over to corn in that year's garden, but her father had persisted, saying that he should plant it repeatedly, as it ripened so fast—yet this was already the Fourth of July! Jean felt that her dear father was not in danger, after all, of becoming too practical. But how happy the corn made him! How happy all his enthusiasms made him! Young as she was, Jean felt a maternal pleasure in his anticipations, which previous experiences made her doubt would be fulfilled.

Winnie appeared in the doorway, watching for their return, as Mr. Wolcott and Jean in the phaeton rolled slowly along, following Old King Cole's leisurely advance. Dorcas danced down the steps and down the walk, waving her arms wildly, screaming so loud that it was impossible to hear what Winnie was saying, though her moving lips showed she was doing her best to be heard, nor could Dorcas be understood.

Jean jumped out over the wheel before King Cole had fully stopped. "What is it all about, Dorcas?" she cried. "Your voice is so shrill I can't make out what you say. It is precisely like not being able 'to see the town, it was so full of houses.'"

"Helen was here, Jean," cried Dorcas, jumping up and down as she explained. "Winnie, go back into the

house ; I'm going to tell ! Helen said I was to tell you not to get anything ready to eat to-night ; we wouldn't want any supper here."

Dorcas looked so excited, was plainly so elated that Jean was suspicious.

"A surprise party?" she asked. Then, seeing that Dorcas was torn asunder by her desire to tell she helped her to do her duty. "No, don't tell me, D. dear! Helen told you to keep something a secret, so keep it. All right; I won't make the cake I meant to make, then. What time will the party begin?"

"At dusk, Miss Jean," said Winnie; she was as eager as Dorcas to reveal what she knew. "And dinner is beautifully ready. The green peas is so perfect you would never believe! I boiled sweet peas for you; Master Steve said I was to tell you; he thought you didn't know it."

"Did you tell Steve they were sweet peas?" asked Jean, guessing one of Winnie's funny mistakes. "I didn't know there were sweet peas to boil for dinner, but I'm more than ready to try them." She ran upstairs to make ready for the holiday dinner, blessing Mrs. Claudia Wolcott all over again for Winnie, who made a holiday possible to Jean.

That evening the Wolcotts got together on the porch early, to wait for their guests. Dorcas could

not sit still ; hardly had she seated herself than she began to fidget, bounced up again and ran down the steps eagerly to scan the street for the first glimpse of the expected, and she repeated the performance over and over till Rod put his hands on her shoulders and held her down by main force while he repeated the Declaration of Independence. He was, not unreasonably, proud of knowing it from beginning to end. But when he released Dorcas, off she flew again and they all laughed. •

“Let her go, Rod ; she’ll turn into a sky rocket if you don’t,” advised Steve.

At last Dorcas was rewarded, though, as she announced that she “saw them coming,” the others heard them. A concatenation of sounds, fainter, then swelling louder, floated to the group on the porch, funny little shrill whistles, a drum, and singing that made up in volume what it lacked in purely musical quality.

Jean followed the boys in their rush down the steps to join Dorcas who was whirling on the sidewalk like a dervish.

The procession developed. First, marched Roger Cathcart in the character of drum major, a muff strapped on his head, a cutaway coat made in the middle of the nineteenth century and white linen trousers his

costume. He carried an imposing wand, surmounted by a croquet ball and decorated with ribbons, and he marked time with it, using all the twirls and tossings of a veritable drum major's baton, in the hands of a real drum major. Behind Roger marched all the young people of Tidewater who had been Jean's playmates and classmates. Baskets were swinging between some pairs of them, big packages were carried by others, while four able-bodied boys bore an ice-cream freezer on two poles, carried as a water jar is carried in the East. A banner of thinnest muslin, stretched across a frame and oiled, allowed red cambric letters pasted on its surface to be read from both sides. These letters formed an inscription stating that this deputation was "The Tidewater Delegates. To Honor the Poet and Dutiful Daughter, Jean Wolcott."

Jean laughed till she cried, yet was overpowered, in spite of knowing it was all fun; she rightly guessed that Roger had been the originator of this tribute. The bearers of the various baskets, packets and freezer, deposited their burdens on the steps, and some one in a tight-fitting red cambric suit, masked and horned, set off red Bengal fire by way of beginning the celebration. The boys put up a frame which they had brought ready for the purpose, and from it rockets and Roman candles sped oceanward, lighting up the sky

eastward and, for the moment, dimming the steady industry of the revolving light, out on the distant rocks. When the fireworks were nearly over "the committee" unpacked the hampers and served a supper; sandwiches, lemonade, cakes, ice-cream, everything that the most patriotic or the hungriest could ask for a Fourth of July banquet.

Then came the glory of the evening, the splendid tribute upon which Roger prided himself and upon which he had expended ingenuity, time and dollars. From the top of the fireworks frame flashed upon the darkness characters formed by electricity, supplied by portable batteries fastened to the frame. These characters read: "G. W. 1776. J. W. 1913." That was all, but they who ran might read! George Washington, to be commemorated on his country's birthday as its father. Jean Wolcott, to be honored by her comrades as a genius and a daughter!

Jean laughed and laughed, embarrassed, amused, pleased, all at once, and "the delegates" loudly applauded.

Helen hugged her friend on the spot. "It's a lark, of course," she said, "but, after all, it's so!" Which, though not a lucid remark, clearly conveyed its meaning, for Roger cried:

"Hear, hear! It sure is!" and beamed on Jean so

approvingly that it was like the sun "shining on the sea, shining with all his might," though it was, if not "the middle of the night," long after the sun's working hours.

It was pleasant to have good old Roger so friendly again, after a partial eclipse of his cordiality! Jean went to bed that night with the final patriotic choruses, with which the Fourth of July celebration had ended, ringing in her ears, exceedingly happy. It was a kindly world that she lived in; it was good to lie down in the old Wolcott house, to be Jean Wolcott, of Tidewater, among the people who had been her forefathers' people, through the generations of descent in this unchanging town! Her troubles were dissolving, too, and that was good. It was good to be alive to the human side of living, to be warmed by this comical tribute, which held an approval of her in its fun-making, an approval that Jean felt and leaped to meet. Best of all the dear mother was recovering! What a happy July holiday it was, thought Jean, falling asleep gratefully.

CHAPTER IX

JEAN MAKES ANOTHER NEW ACQUAINTANCE

“**M**ISS JEAN,” Winnie saluted Jean on her appearance, ten days after the Fourth, omitting her usual “good-morning,” “Miss Jean, what is it a sign of when you dream something like a big imp, an evil spirit, is holding you head downward over a hot fire, to cook you for a horrible fierce African’s dinner?”

“Mercy me, Winnie, I don’t know!” cried Jean. “I don’t believe a dream like that was ever dreamed in Tidewater! It must be a sign that the windows were closed in the bedroom, or else that there was something for supper that never must be eaten at a supper again.”

But Winnie refused to smile. “Miss Jean,” she said impressively, “the windows was as open as they could be, and a lamb could have eaten the peaceful supper. And such a dream has been dreamed in Tidewater, the very last night that ever shone on the world. By me. And I ask you, miss, what it could be the sign of?”

“I have no idea; I don’t know much about signs, Winnie. It sounds like a dreadfully uncomfortable

dream ; you must have had something wrong with you. Now I look at you, Winnie —— Why, yes ; you look queer ! What is it ? Are you sick ? ” cried Jean alarmed.

“ Miss Jean, I am not sick, but I am ill,” replied Winnie, not intending to correct Jean, but differentiating between her symptoms by the English restriction on the terms. “ I feel all over.”

“ Well, you look it,” said Jean, trying to be unselfishly concerned, but with a keen sense of what Winnie’s illness would mean to her, now that she had learned to depend on the little maid. “ Go up-stairs and lie down, Winnie ; I will get breakfast.”

“ No, Miss Jean,” said Winnie firmly. “ While I can stand, I stand by my flag. I take it Rule Britannia and the saying : ‘ England expects every man to do his duty,’ is for women, too, though in the olden times and before the *suf-forage-ettes* ”—Winnie mispronounced the word carefully, in a way that struck Jean as suitable —“ attacked His Majesty in the windows of his realms with rocks, England never said what she expected of women, because it was plain to be seen. So while I can stick to my post I shall always feel that posted I must remain. I will get breakfast, Miss Jean, though as to who will get the dinner is in the hands of the future, which no man knows till it goes past you.”

Jean beat a retreat at the close of this declaration of Winnie's principles; her resolute expression showed that protest would be useless, and Jean's overpowering desire to laugh seemed heartless.

Carrying out her interpretation of Rule Britannia and Nelson's immortal words, Winnie served breakfast and insisted on continuing her morning work unassisted. Jean, therefore, set out after breakfast to weed the bed of scarlet geraniums. It glowed against the background of ocean, at what should properly have been the rear of the house, except that the sea reversed the order of its importance.

There was a crisp breeze that made endurable this performance of a task that was Rodney's. Rod had a talent for eluding tasks, and this morning he had darted off early; faithful Steve's flower beds, at the front, showed faultless spaces of lightly raked brown earth between their blooming green.

Jean could never weed half-heartedly; she always set out with trowel and daintiness and ended by grubbing with her immolated fingers. She had had precisely time enough to make her hair pretty in ringed disorder, and her face charming under its flushed warmth, but her hands quite grimy with soil, when there came up the steps from the beach, and over the dune that intervened between the house and the cliff,

a lady. She was young, though to Jean's sixteen years she seemed so only to a degree. She was pretty, and she was clad in the most faultless of linens, in a style eloquent of Broadway. In her hand she carried a recent issue of *Guernsey's Magazine*. She advanced smiling and Jean thought with dismay of her pink gingham morning gown, though she could not help knowing that it was becoming, and of its sleeves tucked up to her elbows and the rounded arms it thus revealed decorated with loam—and of her unlucky earth-coated hands!

“What fun to catch the poet unawares! This is the poet?” asked the stranger, advancing upon Jean with a smiling grace that bore upon it the atmosphere of a world removed from Tidewater.

“I—I have written some verses ——” hesitated Jean, wondering and embarrassed.

“Don't I know that! I received this *Guernsey's* in the mail last night and read these graceful verses, ‘The Racing Waves,’” said the stranger, smiling on Jean and tapping the magazine which she carried under her arm as if she and it shared a pleasant secret. “Then, as I held this magazine open upon my knee and wondered who might be the new contributor—Jean Wolcott—along came Mine Host of the Garter—only I am stopping at the Cliff House!—and told me that Jean Wol-

cott was a Tidewater girl, and an exceedingly young one at that ! He seemed visibly to swell with pride in her when his eye fell on the printed page that bore her name, and he volunteered his information, radiant with reflected glory ! It would not have occurred to me to ask him about the new poet. So this morning, having found out just where you lived, I ventured to stroll this way to see if I could find one of my craft for a little chat. We come away from town to rest from shop talk, but, after all, we miss it."

"Do you write ? Won't you come up and sit on the porch ? There's a lovely sea breeze this morning," murmured Jean, fluttering with delightful embarrassment, though her visitor had talked on to put her at her ease.

"Everything is more than lovely this morning ; breeze, land, sea, sky, everything !" affirmed Jean's caller, accepting the invitation. "I write, yes. I write a great deal, but I don't write great things. My name is Hester Balfour."

"Oh !" cried Jean. "I've read lots of your stories ; I always read them first."

"Why, you dear little poet !" cried Miss Balfour. "That was the nicest sort of a compliment. It is such a joy to write a story, that it ought to be reward enough. But one is most glad to find some one enjoy-

ing the reading of it: there has been such a doubt in one's mind that any one ever would want to read it, that is, since it was finished! It's a queer thing about a story! You start out with positive rapture, you're so confident that this time you have a great idea! And gradually that slips away into a doubt, and then the doubt gives way to certainty that it is no good, and you force yourself to write on without a bit of inspiration, and with your mind and fingers heavy with despondency. And when it is done you know that you have spoiled it! So you send it off with a sort of desperate discouragement, yet determination. And when it is published you wonder if you really ever wrote anything so decent! But no matter how conceited your own cleverness may make you, when you see it in type, you go through the same variation of spirits with the next tale, and send it off just as sure as you were before that you have spoiled a good idea. We're a queer confraternity, aren't we, little sister?"

"I didn't suppose any one who was a real writer, and—and such a writer as Hester Balfour, would feel like that," said Jean, timidly, yet happily. "That is the way I always feel, about a story I try to write, or verses, either. But then *I* am right! I do have good ideas, sometimes, but I don't know how to carry them out—yet."

“We are all alike, more or less,” returned Miss Balfour. “Nobody who is the least bit an artist will ever feel that he has worthily treated his inspiration, whether he paints, carves or writes his thought. Will you tell me about yourself? Do you write much? And do you intend to make writing your work in life? I knew you were only a slip of a girl, but I did not realize it till I saw you; your verses gave the first impression of you and, till I saw you, that survived what I was told of you.”

“I should like to write, be a real writer, if I could,” said Jean, with humility that would not have been hers a half year earlier. “But I have been learning quite different work and I think, perhaps, after all, I ought to take my diploma in that first.”

“I forgot to tell you who else had given me a clue to you,” said Miss Balfour. “I came down on the train with the nicest young fellow! We grew quite friendly. He told me his name was Roger Cathcart, and when I confided mine to him and told him my trade was spinning tales, he told me about a girl in Tidewater who had been his little schoolmate, and who wrote beautiful verses and meant to make writing her business in the world. He did not tell me her name, but when Mr. Gibson, of the Cliff House, told me the Jean Wolcott, whose poem is in this *Guernsey's*, was a little Tide-

water lassie I put the two bits of information together, feeling sure that she was also the schoolmate of my nice boy on the train, and that I already knew her. It made me bolder to hunt you up."

"Did Roger tell you about me? He never liked my verses; he never let me know if he thought they, or any of the other things I tried to write, were worth doing," said Jean. "I shouldn't think you'd have to be very bold to hunt me up, Miss Balfour. You know, you must know, how I feel about your coming to see me, how grateful I am to you. I shall be as happy as I can be to think that I've seen you, that you've actually sat right here on our porch with me, when I get over being afraid of you."

Miss Balfour laughed. "Not precisely frightened fear when you can speak of it," she said shrewdly. "I'm not formidable; I'm not old and I'm not great; just a spinner of yarns, like you, only I am twelve years older than you, and twelve years farther toward our goal. Have you published much? You can't have; you haven't lived long enough!"

"Sixteen years, as some one must have told you," smiled Jean. "I have sent lots of verses to papers and magazines, and those which never pay for contributions have published them. This is the first time I've had anything in a big magazine. I didn't know it had been

printed.” She looked hungrily at the magazine in Miss Balfour’s hand.

“ They’ll send you a copy,” said Miss Balfour, handing *Guernsey’s* to Jean. “ Isn’t it beyond telling to see what you’ve written in print ? One’s work changes so in the process ! We know they are the old familiar lines and sentences we constructed so carefully, but they ‘ have suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange.’ I think it must be rather like seeing one’s little boy come home fitted out with his first boyish knickerbockers, when he left home still a little non-descript in skirts ! I envy you in beginning to publish. That keen delight wears off after a time ; you lose your first fine rapture—it’s not a ‘ first fine *careless* rapture ’ by any means, is it ? It’s deeply impressed and impressive. Have you a story on the way ? ”

So she lured Jean on to talk, and Jean began to talk. Before she realized that she was doing so she had confided her hopes and ambitions to this older girl, with the face that was less a pretty face than an irresistible one. Miss Balfour had also an entirely irresistible way of acting as though she were accustomed to no denials, as if she deserved to get her own will because it was indeed a sweet will, as ready to confer benefits as to receive them.

Jean not only told her about her dreams of fame, but

she told her of her mother, of how she had gone away, and that she was getting better. She did not say anything of her hard struggle to look after the family, to perform unaccustomed tasks, but Miss Balfour was far too quick-sighted, too sympathetic to miss the lines of the little story which were not made clear, but were to be read between the visible ones.

“That’s a sweeter story than you could invent, dear little Miss Wolcott ——”

“Jean,” interrupted the younger girl.

“Dear little Jean,” Miss Balfour adopted the amendment. “Of course you are more than recompensed for the hard days by your dear mother’s improvement. Oh, Jean, my mother did not improve! She was ill, too, when I was two years older than you now are, and she did not turn back to me, though I tried and prayed to hold her! She went on and away from me; so gentle, so devoted, so loath ever to grieve me, yet she went on that weary road to her rest and left me with a longing that nothing can ever quite still. I am glad, dear, that your mother is coming home to you.”

There was silence for a moment, Jean’s eyes full of tears, Miss Balfour looking far out to sea with eyes that sought beyond the line where sky and ocean met. She aroused herself with a long intaken breath.

“Aside from the greatest reward you could have,

child, and aside from the effect this summer must have in strengthening, deepening your character, it will do something else—though that is a part of the other. It will teach you much that you must know before you can write well. It is not lost time, my dear ! But if it did no more for you than make you a finer woman, that's the main thing, after all !”

“That's what Roger Cathcart says,” said Jean, with a tiny laugh.

“Sane and sensible ; fine lad, my acquaintance, Roger Cathcart,” said Miss Balfour. “Though he had never heard of my stories, and did not know Hester Balfour's name from a housemaid's—yet that may prove how sensible he is !” she added gaily. “Now, little Jean Wolcott, poet and housekeeper and happy, devoted daughter, I must get back to the Cliff House. I'm quite sure that if its guests are not in to dinner at the hour, they suffer—and so do all the viands ! It's a nice little hotel, a boarding-house seen through a magnifying glass. I must not keep you here, either.”

“Dinner will not be served at the Cliff House for a long, long time ; it is early,” said Jean. “And I have nothing to do that can't wait. Please stay just a little longer, if you don't mind, and—and —— Could you tell me something about the authors in New York ? You know them ?”

Miss Balfour sank back with profound pleasure in this youthful idealism. "I know a few of them," she said, "and many of the others I have met at dinners and luncheons. I will tell you what I can ; please ask questions, to start me off in the direction in which you'd like me to run."

She talked, easily, entertainingly, well for more than an hour longer. When she arose to go Jean's cheeks were burning with the excitement of her first contact with the fairy-land of letters which she longed to enter. Miss Balfour spoke of people whose existence Jean saw afar, through the rainbow-hued mists of the incense which she burned to their talents, people who existed to her as writers, rather than as people, but whom Miss Balfour knew familiarly in the flesh—and still survived ! Miss Balfour herself, but a short time ago, had been one of these myth-like ideals, yet here she was, emerged into the sunshine of a Tidewater July morning, sitting on the porch talking to Jean as if the young girl were one of the initiated, almost as if she were a friend !

Miss Balfour went away, promising to return, if Jean would let her, leaving the girl in a confusion of bliss. It looked as though now, just when Jean had put aside her ambitions in order to do her duty to her loved ones, the fairies were rewarding her with her first opportunity to attain those ambitions. For Miss

Balfour had spoken of opening to Jean the door of the House of Fame, to which, through her large editorial and publishing acquaintance, she held a key.

Jean stood for a few moments after her guest had gone looking out to sea with the rapt gaze of one who saw visions. Then she aroused herself with a perception that the house was perfectly still and that she had known that it was so for some time, though she could not descend to realization of this knowledge.

Jean hurried through the hall that ran from front to rear of the old colonial house and opened the kitchen door. There, prone upon the floor, lay Winnie, unconscious, her bulky little frame revealing the edge of the tin pan upon which it had fallen. The potatoes which the pan had held were scattered around her, as if she were a tremendous specimen of that variety of cactus called "old hen and chickens." In her right hand Winnie still clasped the short peeling knife with which she had been about to carry out her Casabianca principles when she had been overcome.

"Oh, Winnie!" gasped Jean, and she ran to the sink for a dipperful of the cold water which the Wolcotts still obtained from the ancient spring well of olden times, disregarding modern supplies.

Winnie's eyes opened feebly as Jean dampened her forehead and wrists, and rubbed her pulses.

“I’m—mortified,” murmured Winnie by an effort.
“It’s—the—first.”

“Never mind fainting, Winnie; it used to be fashionable,” said Jean. “Where do you feel ill? Have you pain?”

Winnie negatively rolled her head from side to side on the floor. “I felt—strange. Then I fell—with the—potatoes,” she said.

With great relief Jean heard the boys coming in together by the back door.

“Well, I will!” exclaimed Steve fervently.

“Say, what’s up with the Winner?” asked Rodney, forgetting, in his alarm, that Winnie did not know that he thus referred to her in private.

“Winnie’s not well; we must help her up-stairs,” said Jean. “Rod and Steve, put your arms under her shoulders and lift her. Winnie, take my hands and pull.”

“My, she looks bleached! I’m going to get her some of mother’s grape wine,” cried Steve, and carefully shifted his share of Winnie’s weight upon his brother while he carried out his intention.

The home-made wine enabled poor Winnie to stagger along, leaning on the boys, and to mount the stairs slowly and with difficulty. Jean helped her to bed and left her to the sleep, into which she at once fell, while

Jean ran down-stairs to get together something in lieu of the dinner which was overdue.

Dorcas danced in while Jean was hurrying her preparations and trying not to worry over Winnie's breakdown, gaily waving a skirt torn from belt to hem.

"The Lumley boy, Bert Lumley, dared me to teeter on the highest pile down at the sawmill, Jean, and my skirt caught. But aren't you glad it did, 'cause if it hadn't I'd have been broken to crumbs, 'most likely ; I slipped," cried the irrepressible child, heading off blame, as she often did, by an outpouring of enthusiasm.

"Jean, dear, isn't dinner somewhat late ? I asked Mr. Lovett in to dinner to look at my rudder afterward ; I forgot to mention it to you, or to Winnie. Ah, yes ; there he is coming now. By the way, where is Winnie ?" said Mr. Wolcott, appearing in the doorway at this moment with his sweetest, but most absent-minded smile.

"Oh, father, father !" cried poor Jean. "Winnie's sick ; there's no dinner ! If only you had told me ! Oh, father ! Go straight up-stairs, Dorcas, and take off that skirt. Please, father, meet Mr. Lovett and tell him — No, I will !"

"Now, Jean, take it easy !" advised Steve, checking her with his quiet smile, a hand on her shoulder. "Count ten, you know ! Make it a hundred ! On

July fifteenth, 2001, it won't matter a speck. Rod, go along out with father and tell Mr. Lovett we just found the Winner—don't forget and call her that!—on the floor, and the dinner fell down with her. Tell him we can't have anything but a lunch to-day; and that isn't quite ready. Now, Jean, don't get flustered! Say, how suddenly sudden things happen; ever notice it?"

"Oh, Steve, you flat-iron!" cried Jean, with an intent to express Steve's ability to smooth out wrinkles, but making Steve laugh at her word. "I should think I had noticed it! And it will be worse to have Winnie sick than it was before she came! And just when I was getting on so beautifully and Miss Balfour made me feel as if I was bound in vellum, living in a mahogany bookcase!"

Lacking the clue to this remark Steve stared, but if Jean were getting delirious it was best to pretend not to see it.

"I'll get in some lettuce and wash it, and then I'll cut down and fetch the quickest steak there is at the shop," said this reliable young brother. "We'll make Rod fry some of the wrecked potatoes and grind coffee, and maybe D. might set the table; she'll do it if we dare her to, that's certain."

To her own surprise Jean laughed, but not too mer-

rily. It is hard enough to descend from Parnassus in the safest, gentlest, least bumping parachute, but to be thrown down! There's no denying Jean was badly jarred.

CHAPTER X

JEAN'S VORTEX

HELEN LUMLEY had been spending a few days with a cousin in West Tidewater. As soon as she came back she hurried over to see Jean, bursting into the house with a call that had been these two girls' signal to each other for many a day.

"Ha'yo, Jeannie! I've come to get you to join a fishing party this afternoon, half a dozen of —— Why, Jean, what's the matter?" cried Helen, stopping short in dismay.

Jean sat in the disordered kitchen, among the waiting breakfast dishes, rubbing her right hand ruefully with her left to divert her mind from the hurt of a cut that she had just tied up. Dorcas was actually grave and quiet as she swept up the ruins of a broken dish and its contents; she looked at Helen and shook her head in a way so un-Dorcas-like that Helen was instantly alarmed. "Where's Winnie? What's wrong?" she asked.

"Winnie is up-stairs," replied Jean; her voice sounded as drooping as her body looked. "I think I'm

likely to go fishing, Helen! Go dishing is more in my line!" Jean waved her rag-clad finger toward the laden table with a sorry attempt at facetiousness. "Winnie has tonsillitis, a severe case; she is up-stairs in bed and Dr. Blaisdell is attending her. I'm trying to take care of her, but I'm afraid the poor girl needs more care than she gets. I won't let Dorcas go up for fear of contagion. So I'm not only alone again with my housekeeping, but I've a patient on my hands—and she's a patient patient! Winnie really is a good creature! She tries so hard not to want anything! I've dropped back a little since I had Winnie, so it is hard to work. I don't mean to be irreverent, but to save my life I can't keep out of my head that line in the Gospel: 'The last end of that woman was worse than the first.'"

Helen smiled, but she looked heartily sorry for Jean. "Of course it is harder than ever for you now," she said.

"And it is so boiling for the past few days!" sighed Jean. "I could get on better if only some one would hold down the thermometer."

"Hang it upside down," advised Helen.

"Then the mercury would burst through the bulb; it's bound to go up farther every day. Dorcas is good, though; I never knew Dorcas could be such a steady girl. She's sorry for Winnie and also for her afflicted

sister. She helps me as steadily as Steve himself ! I think her name is beginning to strike in," said Jean, with a smile for the witch-child returning from hanging up her dust-pan.

"That's good !" cried Helen. "I'll tell you what, Jean, I'm not going fishing either. I'm coming here to make you a visit. If I'd known you were in such a scrape I'd have come right back from West Tidewater. I'm coming here to help you out ; at least I can look after Winnie."

Jean started up, her face illumined by this joyful announcement.

"Oh, Helen, I can't let you ! Yet I can't resist letting you. I am so tired ! I tried to get one of our three Tidewater 'visiting help,' as Mrs. Scanlon calls herself, but they were all swallowed up by the boarding-houses, so I had to get on as best I could without any one. I don't see how I possibly could let you come here to help me, in July, when the sailing and all the summer fun is at its height."

"August," Helen corrected her laconically. "There'll be plenty of fun next month. If I missed that I might live to see another summer ; sixteen isn't the end of hopes, Jean ! At any rate I am coming, and what are you going to do about it ? What are best friends for ?"

"To be the very best things in all the world !" cried

Jean, emphasizing her statement with a tremendous hug. "Nell, you are a C. C.—Colossal Comfort."

"I hope my comfort will never cease!" laughed Helen, seeing that Jean was reviving rapidly. "I'll go home and get some less beautiful clothes, and tell my family that I've taken a place, and I'll be back in no time. I don't see why they didn't tell me, when I got home last night, that Winnie was sick and you were in such a pickle—you poor duck!"

When Helen returned, though it was not long before she came back, Jean had made the kitchen tidy for the morning, dishes were washed, and she was beating up a Spanish cream for dessert, so inspiring had been Helen's coming and the prospect of her reinforcement.

Mr. Wolcott, passing through the room, paused to smile inquiringly at Jean, scenting in his half-conscious way the flavor of hope that had entered the house.

"Oh, father, isn't Helen dear? She's coming to stay with me till Winnie is better!" cried Jean.

"My dear, I'm glad if you enjoy it, and I know you will for you have always been fond of Helen," replied Mr. Wolcott, oblivious to the fact that this was not precisely a visit of pleasure, nor were these the circumstances to make such a visit possible. "I am sorry to hear that Winnie is not well—I think you told me that she has been indisposed for a day or so?"

“Oh, father Wolcott!” cried Jean. “When she has been sick in bed for four days and Dr. Blaisdell has been coming to see her!”

“Dear me, dear me; I seem to recall it now. I hope you are not put about much by it, my child? The young woman was a great help to you, I think you said. But I’ve no doubt you will manage perfectly; you have become such a famous manager, Jean child!”

Mr. Wolcott’s approving smile was serenely unconscious of the vortex into which the present state of things had plunged poor Jean.

“Well, father ——” began Jean. Then she checked herself, opened and closed her lips two or three times, but managed to prevent herself from a vigorous statement of what “managing” was just now costing her.

“I have reached a most interesting stage of my model’s construction,” Mr. Wolcott said, with a sudden access of animation. “Jean, dear, if you cared to visit me in the tower room by and by it might interest you, though you are of the literary, rather than the mechanical turn of mind.”

“Yes, daddy dear, I’ll go if I can. You see there is a great deal to do —— But I’ll call on you, little fatherkins; I’ll make time. Is the model behaving itself?”

“Yes, my dear, it is, as you say, behaving itself

like—well, like a model ! I am elated. I am hurrying back to it, Jean ; I should be glad if dinner were late to-day.” Mr. Wolcott looked around as if he were seeking something, and Jean laughed over her shoulder at him as she ran into the pantry.

“ You funny father-daddykins ! That’s a moderate hurrying, Mr. Bentley Wolcott ! ” she cried. “ No fear of a prompt dinner to-day, though.”

When she came back her father had gone on his way and Helen was coming down the street.

“ We’re going to make a drama of this, Jean,” announced Helen. “ You are to be the Fair Ladye Jehanne and I am the Lady Helena. Winnie is Queen Winifred, ill in her castle, where she is held a prisoner, poisoned by her rival for the throne. We discovered the plot in time to save her life, but she is weak and suffering from the poison, still. The reason why we have to cook for her, though we are court ladies, is that this is the castle where she is imprisoned and her enemies will not allow her any servants, besides we would rather do it, so that no more poison can be put into her food. Don’t you think we can get on easier, and mind the heat less if we make believe like that ? ”

“ It is rather a youthful game, Helen,” laughed Jean. “ I think it would be a strain on my mind to keep it up—with all the rest there is to do ! ”

But Dorcas was enchanted. "I didn't know you could think of such lovely things as that, Helen!" she cried. "What'll I be?"

"You must be the lady of the castle, secretly sympathizing with the queen, but not able to help her, because your cruel husband compels you to keep her imprisoned. Still, you do all that you can for her, secretly helping us to make her less unhappy, as that is the only way you can show your pity for her," said Helen, with an inspiration, thinking that this rôle would serve to keep Dorcas in her present helpful state of mind.

Of course the big girls did not carry out the game, except by fits and starts, when they remembered it. But Dorcas continued it and enjoyed it, except when the older pair exasperated her by forgetting it.

"Now," said Jean, after Helen had put on her big apron and announced herself ready for any duty that Jean should impose, "I have broth to take up to Winnie that is fit for a queen. It has to be heated and perhaps some little trimmings added; it's all ready, but for that. I'm thankful that I made it last night, for there isn't another thing fit for a sick person. It's in the closet, Helen; I brought it up from the cellar; will you get it, please?"

"There's no broth here, Jean," called Helen, after a moment's search.

"In the aluminum kettle ; you may not think it's broth, because it is solid, but it is," Jean called back.

"No solid here that ever can be liquid, and no aluminum kettle," declared Helen.

"Oh, Helen, that's just like Rod ; he never can find anything ! It's directly in front of you —— Why, why ——" Jean stopped short in her rapid onslaught upon the closet, intended to bring forth her broth in triumph.

"Just like Rod ! Can't see anything when it isn't there !" Helen teased.

"Well, I must be losing my mind ; I was sure I set it in there, but even the kettle is gone !" Jean rumpled her hair in precisely her father's way when he was puzzled.

"You know it would be stranger if the kettle were here and the broth gone," said Helen. "Though the absence of both clears Funny and Penny from suspicion."

Jean paid no attention, but hastily overhauled the pantry, the other cupboard, then stood in dismay, pummeling her brains for a further clue.

"What are we to give Queen Winifred if the broth is lost ?" suggested Helen, thinking that a cracker in the hand might be better than broth in an unknown hiding-place.

“Oh, dear me!” Jean was distressed. “I must beat up an egg to sustain her till I can do more. Isn’t it the queerest —— Why, Dorcas, father couldn’t have taken it, could he?”

“The broth!” cried Dorcas, with a shout of laughter. “You don’t use broth for rudders, do you?”

“I don’t know; not in ships’ rudders, but I’m not up in air-ships,” said Jean, rapidly preparing the egg that was to sustain poor Winnie till something else offered.

“Of course you’re not up in air-ships, Jean!” laughed Helen.

“Come with me, Nell, and, after we give Winnie her lunch, we’ll see if it can be father who is guilty. Oh, me, when shall the rest of us have lunch to-day? Fortunately father would rather not be bothered, and we can get along,” sighed Jean.

“Maybe father stole the broth so he wouldn’t have to be bothered to come down again,” said Dorcas.

Jean prepared a small tray with a dainty napkin and one of the prettiest china plates with thin lettuce sandwiches, taken right off the ice, tempting in contrast to the golden egg in its thin glass.

“At least it looks pretty, and Winnie is so grateful for the least thing I do!” said Jean, as she and Helen went up-stairs.

“Winnie, are you starved? Did you think I had forgotten all about you?” asked Jean.

Winnie croaked badly as she replied: “Indeed, Miss Jean, I knew you would never forget me. And I am not so to say hungry, but it’s like my mouth reached down to my heels. I don’t care about eating, but I’m more like a straw than a living female girl.”

“Of course, you poor thing! Sore throats make any one feel like a straw. I had the best broth you ever saw, but it’s gone; some one’s taken it, so I had to bring you this, to save your life a little longer,” said Jean.

“It’s Funny!” declared Winnie, with more animation. “No cat ever was mixed up in all colors the way that one is and had good principles; I’ve always said it and I’ll stand to it.”

“It’s funny enough, but it isn’t Funny who did it,” said Jean. “Her character is good, Winnie, and then she never would steal my best aluminum kettle.”

“Kettle and all?” asked Winnie.

“Kettle and all,” assented Jean. “Poor Funny! You must apologize to her when you get down again, Winnie.”

“I’m coming down this evening, miss, to have the night to rest in, if it’s too soon for me. And then tomorrow I’ll be able to be about longer, because I’ll

know it is not the first time, so is easy for me," said comical little Winnie.

Jean set the tray on a chair by Winnie's side, and she and Helen continued their travels to the tower room.

They found Mr. Wolcott engrossed in his work, so engrossed that they had to speak three or four times before he was conscious of the girls' presence.

The octagonal room was in what looked like a wild confusion of all sorts of queer snarled tackle, but which was undoubtedly arranged, in its disarrangement, so that its occupant could lay his hand instantly on whatever he wanted. A fire which was burning in a low brazier did not make the room warmer. It was already a contradiction to itself; the sea breeze cooled it from all sides, while the sun poured down upon its exposed roof.

"Jean, dear, I did not expect you so soon," said Mr. Wolcott, when he at last realized his visitors. "And Helen? Glad to see you, children. Just a moment till I get this delicate line adjusted, then I'll be ready to receive you properly."

"Father, this isn't the visit I promised to make; this is an errand. You didn't meet any broth wandering around the house, did you?" asked Jean.

"That sentence is not good, Jean; it conveys that the

broth, not I, was wandering," said Mr. Wolcott, who managed to hear English critically, though he missed much else in what was said to him.

"That's what I meant," said Jean. "I had some broth in the cupboard, but it's taken itself off. You didn't meet it on its way, did you?"

"No, my dear. The cat ran away with the pudding bag string, you know. Where were your pets?" hinted Mr. Wolcott.

"And the dish ran away with the spoon," added Jean. "Which is more like it. The kettle is gone this time. Everybody accuses Funny and Penny."

"Reputation counts, my dear, and, though I am a cat lover, I never would attempt to deny that they often confused *mine and thine*," observed Jean's father. "Stay a moment! You say the kettle is gone, too? What sort of a kettle?"

"The darling of my heart—and mother's; the nice, cozy-shaped aluminum kettle," cried Jean, her suspicion becoming certainty on the spot.

Mr. Wolcott looked dreadfully guilty and mortified, as he produced the missing "darling" from the other side of the brazier.

"I borrowed it," he confessed. "I needed something to heat and fuse certain chemicals, so I took this when I was in the kitchen."

“Oh, father! And it is perfectly ruined inside! And to try to lay the blame on the innocent pussies! What did you do with the broth? Is that fused with the chemicals?” cried Jean.

“No, my dear; I doubt that it would have fused, precisely,” replied Mr. Wolcott mildly. “I—to tell the truth, Jean, I threw out the contents of the kettle. I thought it had no value; it looked—I’ve no doubt it was my mistake—but it looked greasy, my dear. I washed the kettle myself,” added Mr. Wolcott proudly.

“Cold broth does look greasy. That was Winnie’s sole hope, fatherkins!” said Jean.

“I am profoundly sorry, Jean. I seem to do harm everywhere, except in this tower room,” said Mr. Wolcott, his satisfaction instantly vanishing. “I’ll go immediately to buy whatever you desire to give your little maid. I’ll leave my work to go.”

Plainly Mr. Wolcott felt that greater proof of contrition was beyond human power to give.

Jean hugged him on the spot. “You dear, plaintive fatherkins!” she cried. “You’ll not go an inch! I’ll send a boy after anything I need—if ever one of the boys comes in. You’re such a lovable darling, only you’re not meant to be anything but a genius, in a tower room, ‘up above the world so high,’ just like the twinkling little star! You’re to come down in half an

hour—don't forget, Bentley Wolcott, dear! There's to be a dinner of herbs, that means lettuce sandwiches and sardines—in half an hour. And you may as well keep the aluminum kettle, fatherkins; it's no good, except for fusing, now.

"Isn't father lovely?" Jean demanded of Helen as they went down the narrow, winding stairs from the tower room, having given her father a farewell hug and shake.

Helen had watched the little scene with amused pleasure, thinking that no other father and daughter in all the Tidewaters were like this pair.

"Don't you know, I think he's like one of those sweet cherubs, all head and wings, no feet on the ground—nor anywhere else."

Helen laughed so hard that she slipped off one of the steps and barely saved herself from a serious tumble.

"Do you know what a nice-funny family you all are?" she cried. "Dorcas is a case, and you're not a bit like a girl of sixteen. No other girl says the sort of things you do. And there's your father, and Rod is a sort of comet."

"Mother and Steve are just plain 'best folks'! I suppose that's all true. But I'm 'going on seventeen,' Nell, my chum, and I'm not nearly as queer as I was. Who is down-stairs?" Jean paused to listen but some

one, who had spoken to the cat, relapsed into silence.

“Oh, Step-grand! You frightened me,” Jean said descending further and spying a skirt she recognized. “I was afraid it was real company. It’s been a dreadful day, but Helen has come to stay, and Winnie’s better, so the worst is over.”

“I brought beef tea for Winnie,” announced Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, and Jean laughed at the timeliness of the gift. “I passed Dorcas on the way here. She is with the Crosswell children, and she has torn her dress.”

“Then the worst is really over!” cried Jean. “Dorcas has been an angel. Dorcas is like the ‘knee deeps’ in March; when you hear them you know spring is coming, and when Dorcas is good and quiet it means a frost! If she’s noisy and naughty then the bad weather is over.”

“I’m glad if you can derive comfort from her symptoms,” said Mrs. Claudia with the tiny laugh that was her tribute to Jean’s cleverness.

CHAPTER XI

JEAN'S FEARS TAKE FORM

ONE of the best, as well as one of the saddest facts about life is that nothing in it lasts long. Constantly shifting and changing, joys diminish, fade and are past. Yet, again, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." So, though happiness must be held with fear, sorrow again gives place to happiness, and the total balance of light and shade makes life beautiful and interesting. Whether it be the grief that crushes the heart, or the annoyances that shatter the nerves, nothing lasts long, and so all things are endurable.

Jean's domestic troubles of that summer reached a climax when faithful Winnie fell ill, but after ten days of struggling through the most heated period of that season, with Winnie ill and no one to help her, till Helen came to her rescue, Jean found her burden growing lighter again.

Winnie recovered rapidly and, after Winnie was able to resume her work, Jean was set free to enjoy part of the good times which summer brought to Tidewater by the sea. Miss Balfour had settled down to spend

the whole season in the lovable, sleepy old town which had won her heart; she was fond of Jean and greatly interested in her. Jean was made happy by her friendship; she poured out reams of description of this friendly author to her mother, repeating word for word on paper most of their conversations. Jean had a habit of telling her mother every detail of all that she did, a habit that had never been broken from her childhood, now continued by the pen. Just what all the boys and girls said and did, precisely what happened at every party she went to, in every game she played, in every talk she shared, Jean talked over with her mother, as less blessed girls do with their mates. Mother and daughter were not only one in age, but in interests; their intimacy was perfect. Not till years later would Jean realize how rare and how protective, how beautiful, was this confidence that made every pleasure that came to the girl only half enjoyed till she and her mother had thus talked it over.

It was the first day of August and Jean was out in the yard rapturously sniffing her white lilies. No one ever quite enjoys the fragrance of flowers till they are the result of such sacrificing care as Jean had bestowed on the flowers which were now rioting in her flower beds.

Rod sauntered in at the gate with his straw hat on

the back of his head, framing his handsome, flushed face. Jean looked up at him with a bright smile.

“Rod, aren’t they just actual blessings!” she cried.

Rod’s attitude to the flowers was the opposite of Jean’s; they reminded him of neglect, that his sister, with all her other cares, had done what he had promised to do—and had failed to do—for these abundant blossoms.

“Hello, Jean. Yes, they’re all right,” said Rod. “But sit down a minute; I want to tell you something.”

“I can’t sit down, Rod. I’ve had a man here trying to get me to subscribe to the most gilded set of books you ever saw, and neither a derrick, nor dynamite could have got him to go, though I told him I didn’t like the books one bit. So I’ve lots to do; I can’t sit down.” Nevertheless, as Jean spoke she dropped down on the upper step and clasped her knees, ready to listen. “Dinner will be late if I don’t help Winnie,” she added, as a balm to her conscience which bade her not to delay.

“Oh, well, we’re not such a killing punctual family!” observed Rodney with truth. “A few minutes more or less won’t matter with dinner. There’s something important to tell you about, honest. Something that may make a lot of difference.”

"Oh, Rod, I oughtn't! Talk fast, then," sighed Jean.

"Well," said Rod, settling himself beside Jean, stretched out, his elbows on the step above his seat, his feet resting on the lower step, and showing a sudden embarrassment, "I've known about it some time, but I couldn't tell you before. You know I did give you a hint that Anthony Dillon knew a thing or two about business."

"Anthony Dillon—Mr. Dillon! Is what you have to tell me about him?" asked Jean.

"I should say it was! But it has just as much to do with us—more. He has a scheme that is great. He wants to buy this house," said Rod.

"Buy it! Buy this house! Well, he can't," cried Jean.

"Now don't you go to making up your mind beforehand, but listen," exclaimed Rod impatiently. "He is willing to give us three thousand dollars for the whole place, house and fourteen acres—isn't it? That's a good price. He says he may never get the worth of the money; it's a risk, he says, but he's willing to take the risk, and he won't do anything mean with us—with me, his friend." The boy fairly swaggered with importance as he lay the length of the steps. "Tony tells me, frankly, that he hopes to make a good thing

of it, but he may lose—that's his luck. All we have to do is to take up with his offer. We aren't cheating him if it's more than it's worth, and we haven't anything to say if he makes money out of it; that's his luck, as I said before; it's perfectly fair and above-board on both sides. Tony's idea is to put up some cottages and bungalows for summer people and trust to luck to making them pay. He's been sounding father, and you know how father is—no more business in him than in a downy chick! Tony sees there may be trouble in getting father to sell, so he says if I can persuade father into it, he'll see that I get a commission for my trouble, if the thing goes through."

"Rodney Wolcott! Isn't that all you want to know about the plan? About Anthony Dillon, too?" cried Jean, stiff and alert in attitude as she heard her brother's story, her eyes flashing, her cheeks burning. "That man offers you—you, a boy!—a bribe to persuade your father, your own father, into doing something he wants him to do! If I had been a boy and any one had made me such a proposal, I think I'd have knocked him down. It's altogether too much like a bribe to commit treason."

"Oh, gee!" groaned Rod, in utter disgust. "For goodness' sake, Jean, do be sensible! Flying off like that! Do you think you're one of the Waverley novels,

all stuff and romance, or do you think you're a twentieth century American? You can't talk business with a woman anyhow!"

Jean laughed, a quick, brief little laugh, half scorn, half amusement.

"Perhaps a man knows more about business than a woman; few women in their own homes have much chance to learn much about business. But I doubt if an inexperienced boy knows much more about it than his sister, fifteen months older than he is; I imagine they're about on an equally ignorant business standing," she said. "And as to the romance of the Middle Ages and the twentieth-century American, Rodney, honor is honor, and loyalty hasn't gone out of fashion. Your friend Dillon knows a little too much about business and not enough about a boy's duty to his father, Rod. And you're foolish enough to let him flatter you into being his cat, and you lend him your paw to pull his chestnuts out of the fire! A commission paid to you for bringing father to see it his way!"

"Jiminy crickets, Jean, don't you suppose I'd hand over anything I got to father?" demanded Rod.

"Dear Rod, of course you would!" cried Jean, seeing that it would be wiser to hide something of what she felt and not leave all the admiration of Rod to Anthony Dillon, for the boy's conceit was wherein his

danger lay. "There never was a mean spot in you; that isn't the point. Of course you would share anything you had with us, but can't you see, Rod? You are too young to coax father into a serious step. And then look at the plan! Of course I'm not up in business matters, but I've helped mother with accounts and I know she always said it was a lucky thing we had a home; the taxes are not as heavy as rent would be. If we sold this house, father being the dreamer he is, we would be dreadfully cramped. We'd have only a hundred and fifty dollars a year interest on the money the house brought; the house is worth more than that to us. If father were willing to sell, if this Dillon had got him interested in his scheme—and he easily might have, father being father!—then it would have been for us to have tried to get him to keep the house. Imagine what mother would say if she knew! Mr. Dillon had no right to get a boy like you to be a sort of secret partner!" Jean's indignation blazed up again as she ended.

"You never did like Tony," growled Rod sulkily.

"And if I did not like him this makes me proud of my instinct," retorted Jean. "No one who was straight would offer a boy a commission for getting his father to do such a thing as this. It is a bribe for you to work against father. No matter if it is

better for us to sell, it isn't right to get you to work secretly for an outsider. Try to look at it fairly, Rod; try to realize how young you and I are. Don't think of yourself as a clever young man, but as a nice, bright boy, and you'll see it's poor business for a grown man to use you—to bribe you—to help him! But, Rod, you are old enough to understand how bad it would be for us to lose our home; it is hard enough for us to manage as it is."

"It is you who don't understand. You have always been a dreamer like father, 'way up in the clouds. Every one says so," said the boy impatiently. "This is a chance to sell the old house for a good price, to make some money, that's what it is, and if I did get into it—if Tony gave me some stock of the company, or something like that, it would be for the good of the whole family."

Rod spoke importantly, yet this was a good thing to say. Jean rose and laid her hand on her brother's shoulder kindly, feeling years older than Rod, whose self-satisfaction was exceedingly crude and boyish.

"Rodney, dear," she said, "that is a nice spirit, and I know you mean exactly what you say, but you are altogether wrong. Dreamer or not—and I haven't been dreaming lately, you must admit that—but dreamer or not, I can see clearly how fatal it would be to the Wol-

cotts to exchange their old home for three thousand dollars—or for twice that. Tell Mr. Dillon that we would not sell, that you don't want to coax father into it, but even if you did want him to sell, you couldn't possibly act as an agent for some one else, without your father's knowing your bargain with the outsider."

Rodney shook off Jean's hand. "I shall do my very best to work father up into being so wild about the scheme that nothing could keep him from selling," declared the boy defiantly. "And, if I know anything about my father, I'll succeed. He depends on my judgment more than you know. Father thinks I'm just about it, if you want to be told the truth."

Jean knew that this was the truth. Rod's defiance frightened her; at the same time it aroused her to indignation that Rod could be so blinded, could be so utterly unable to feel the wrong of the position he had taken. Once more her eyes blazed fire; there was no trace in her now of Jean, the dreamer.

"If you do this, Rodney, I shall leave no stone unturned to defeat you," she cried. "I promised mother I'd keep house faithfully for her till she came back. I'll keep her house for her in another sense, Rod! Oh, Rod, Rod, how can you let this stranger blind you, deaden your sense of honor, as he has done?"

"Father doesn't know what's good for us; there's no

earthly reason why a man's son shouldn't show him a good thing," said Rod, quoting Anthony Dillon, as Jean felt sure. "I can't help being under sixteen ; I'm just as much my father's son as if I was thirty. If I was thirty, you'd think it was all right for me to get father to go into a good thing, if I knew about it and he didn't. You're nothing but a moonstruck girl. I guess it's lucky I do go ahead and have a friend like Tony to put me wise to a trick or two!" muttered Rod wrathfully. And Jean went quickly into the house without another word.

"Miss Jean," said Winnie, as Jean, short of breath and with reddened cheeks, flashed into the kitchen, "there is a young man waiting for you in the sitting-room, and I will not deceive you, Miss Jean ; it is Mr. Cathcart. He came around this way and we both heard you talking, out on the steps, on the other side, with Master Rodney. Said Mr. Cathcart : 'Jean is engaged in bringing up Rodney. I should not like to interfere with what she is saying.' And he laughed, Miss Jean, for it sounded as if you were annoyed. Said Mr. Cathcart further : 'I will go into the house, Winnie, and improve my mind with a book. Tell your Miss Jean, when she comes in, that I am here, if you please.' So I have told you, Miss Jean, and I would like to say to you that I have done everything that needs to be

done, and that you need not think of helping me, for dinner will be ready in time and satisfactory, as I make bold to be sure and certain."

"Thank you, Winnie. You are such a comfort! But I'm 'sure and certain' myself that Mr. Cathcart will not keep me long," laughed Jean.

"Hallo, Jean!" said Roger, looking up as Jean entered. "Seems funny to be waiting in the parlor, like a regular, proper caller."

"Why did you wait here? Rod and I were outside," returned Jean, feeling so glad to see her old chum, and to see him his old cordial self, that her disturbance of mind began to fade at once.

"That's why!" laughed Roger. "Sounded as if you were taking your mother's place and scolding poor Rod."

"Mother never scolds. Neither was I," said Jean, indifferent to sentence construction. "But I did say all I could to Rod; he needs it."

"Nothing the matter?" hinted Roger.

"Of course there is!" cried Jean vehemently. "That Anthony Dillon is the matter, has been ever since he came! Rod is bewitched. He flatters the boy till he is putty."

"I thought you liked him better, Jean," said Roger beaming. "He's here a lot; so much that I

haven't cared about coming lately. I don't like him myself."

"I like him better!" cried Jean. "I dislike him better! I've disliked him from the first, and now I know why I do; I didn't know why before, but that didn't alter it. I'd love to tell you about it, Roger, but I suppose I ought to wait till I see how it comes out, as it's Rod's affair. I imagine I'll have to tell you about it, some day; I'm afraid it won't come out, and I'll need help."

"For whatever you want apply here!" said Roger, tapping himself on the chest. "Some of the Tidewater fellows have seen things in the beautiful Dillon that they don't admire. I'm precious glad you haven't altered your opinion. But we won't waste time talking about that stranger in our midst—as the Tidewater *Sentinal* would put it, like a cannibal! If he bothers you, Jean, or is a bad influence over Rod, I'll wish he were eaten up! What I came for is to take you sailing. I've got a big lunch on the *Maid of Orleans*, and mother is going, and Mrs. Lumley and Helen. We're going to make the light and come up on the tide to-night, get in about nine or so."

"Oh, Roger, and it's so long since I went as far as that!" sighed Jean. "I wonder if I might?"

"You might not refuse!" said Roger. "Get on

your long coat and your cap, Jean, and be quick about it. We've lost time already, though I did set two as the hour for sailing. Take a piece of pie, or something, in your lily-white hand and eat on the way ; there's enough on the *Maid* for a small army to eat ; dinner won't be missed by you, I'll wager."

"I've got to say yes !" cried Jean, and ran off to tell Winnie to look after her family and hastily to make herself ready for an afternoon and evening of sailing.

"Miss Jean," said funny Winnie, with solemn approval, "I will not let your father want for a thing, even though he would not notice it, and I will keep my eye on Dorcas just as steady as her never-standing-stillness will let me. Give yourself no concern, but enjoy your voyages heedlessly. Faithful and patient were you to me when I had tonsilitis in my throat, and faithful will I be while you are gone."

Jean ran laughing away, thanking Winnie, but convulsed over her formidable array of words.

The *Maid of Orleans* was a white little, tight little craft of speed and endurance. She lay at her moorings off shore, and Roger rowed his party out to her in two installments ; Mrs. Lumley and his mother first, the two girls last, because he had some of the hampers containing his boasted great supply of provisions to

transport also. The division was necessary also because Loyal, Roger's big, devoted spaniel, had to share the sail, for sailing was his harmless mania and Roger's withdrawal from his sight a sorrow so great that it never was inflicted upon him without necessity.

Roger made the *Maid's* tender fast to the moorings, got up sail—with Helen's and Jean's help, for they were both "seaworthy," as Roger said—and the white cat-boat started off with the southwesterly breeze that made her lie over just enough to send the foam across her bow, as she cut through the water with her sail close hauled.

Anthony Dillon, the fear of his succeeding with her father, the blindness of Rod's infatuation all dropped back into unreality for Jean. There is a magic in casting off from land that sends trouble to the land of dreams. The reaction from her recent excitement told in Jean's silence. All the downward sail she leaned on the leeward side of the fleet little craft, dabbling her hands over the rail in the water, watching it flash over the bow in the sunlight, restfully hypnotized by the spell of sailing.

Mrs. Cathcart and Mrs. Lumley chatted together, seated high on the windward side of the *Maid of Orleans*; Helen and Roger joked and made merry in the stern, though Roger held the tiller in one hand and



SHE CUT THROUGH THE WATER WITH HER SAIL CLOSE HAULED

the main sheet in the other. It was a tacking and gusty breeze that required constant letting out and hauling the sail, as the boat went closer to the wind, or freer of it. Loyal sat in the bow, in the perilously small space before the mast, erect, silent, alert, happy, scenting the air with a restless nose, approving of the sea and of his master's seamanship with all his appreciative heart. And Jean, like the dog, kept silence and basked in the happiness of being alive between the two spaces of sky and ocean.

With the turn of the tide and the rising of a young moon, the *Maid of Orleans* began to beat homeward, slowly, until the wind shifted more easterly and let her come up almost free of the wind.

They came up singing, for the two mothers had not forgotten the proper way to sail up the homeward course, sailing to the sound of music being the only right way of sailing home at night.

"Had a good time, Jeannie?" asked Roger, as he prepared to luff for his moorings.

"Perfectly fine!" sighed Jean, satisfiedly.

"Want one of my marbles?" laughed Roger as they landed, this being the form in which, as a small boy, he had invariably offered Jean consolation when she cried.

"Don't need a marble, too happy as it is," said Jean, stepping ashore.

CHAPTER XII

JEAN'S PLOT

“**L**ETTER from mother, Proxy-Jean,” announced Steve, coming into the house early in the morning. “They overlooked it, somehow, last night and Mr. Beal called to me, when I was going by just now and waved it at me.”

“Breakfast is ready, Steve,” said Jean, slitting the envelope with a pin that she removed from her collar for that purpose. “Steve, I must talk to father.”

“Yes,” nodded Steve, not requiring to be told why. “You’ve got to find out whether he’s weakening. Rod’s doing his best and I’m afraid —— What’s she say?”

“It isn’t more than a note,” said Jean, turning back to the first page of her letter. “‘My dear little house-keeper,’” she read. “‘It is not because I have anything to add to yesterday’s long letter that I am writing, but only because there is a chance for me to send to the post-office this morning, and I like to use almost every such chance to speak to one of you at home. I am better, dear, decidedly better. It has been longer than I expected it to be since I left home, but they tell me

here that I am fortunate to be hoping, as I am, to return before winter. Jean, dear, what queer things we women are, clinging to inanimate, as well as to animate objects we love! When I think of coming home, not only each one of you leaps before my eyes, and I see you illumined, shining with my own joy of anticipation of actually seeing you, but the house itself, that dear, venerable old Wolcott home of ours, comes before me like a living thing, like one of the family that it shelters. It makes my heart beat fast to think of the day when I shall come back to you, and when I think of it, I think of the dignified, beloved old house as one of those who make up the '*you*' I long for with all my might. Curious, how alive, endowed with a personality a house becomes! But our house has been made alive by generations of Wolcott women's loving care—and I'm quite sure those who were Wolcott women by marriage, and not blood—like me—loved it fully as well as its own daughters did.' "

The letter ended with a few warm words of love for her family from the dear, distant mother, and Jean, having read them, folded it and looked at Steve.

"Imagine her coming home to another house! Imagine writing her that it was to be sold!" Jean cried.

Steve's strong face was flushed; it expressed volumes that he did not say.

"We'll put up a stiff fight, Jean," he said. "We'll get Step-grand to help, if we need her. If father wanted to sell the house I suppose we ought to want him to do it, but he will be as sorry as anything, afterward, if he does. He'd be just talked into it. Mother wouldn't have to sign the deed. We had that law in school. But she would."

"Of course she would," said Jean. "Mother would never refuse to let father sell the Wolcott house; she wouldn't refuse to let him do anything he had set his heart on. Well, we'll hope father won't want to sell; I'll try to find out whether he is altering his mind."

Mr. Wolcott was late to breakfast that morning. He had gone to walk and had overstayed his hour, forgetting all about meal-time when cloud-drifts, of a peculiar movement, caught his attention and held him mentally testing his air-ship rudder against their eddyings.

He came in late and apologetic, but Jean was glad that his delay had made the boys and Dorcas have finished their meal and gone before their father returned. The night before Mr. Wolcott had sat long with Mr. Dillon and Rodney out on the cliff, beyond and out of hearing of the house. Rod seemed to have done most of the talking, but Jean, watching anxiously, had seen that Mr. Dillon threw in an occasional remark

to which her father had turned attentively. It seemed to her, too, that he listened to Rod with another air from the indulgent pride with which he had been giving ear to the boy, a pride that did not include approval of the deductions drawn by the boy's cleverness, though that he enjoyed. Last night Mr. Wolcott had harkened with an increasingly alert manner, had asked questions and had nodded his head at the answers. Jean had seen this forebodingly, while she and Steve kept each other silent company, staid, sensible Steve, who saw things clearly, as Rod never would, in spite of his brilliance and more years. To confirm Jean's fear that at last Rod was making headway with his father, the boy had not been able to deny himself a vaunt as he passed her on the stairs, going up to bed, two steps at a time.

"In the bright lexicon of this bright youth there's no such word as fail, Miss Jean," Rod had crowed.

To which Jean had vouchsafed no reply other than an inward one, but the boast had left her more than ever anxious.

After her father had eaten a breakfast that he plainly found good, Jean bent herself to her task of learning just how much mischief had been done. As she poured the last half cup of coffee with which Mr. Wolcott always liked to end breakfast, she passed

it to him with a smile, and said, in that blandishing tone that the best, as well as the youngest of women have instinctively used since the time of Eve, for special ends: "As much sugar as you want, father? And no more cream? Just as you like it, and as mother would pour it? That's good! Then I wonder if you'd mind telling me whether Mr. Dillon has discovered a new argument to give Rod, to prove that we ought to be made homeless?"

"Oh, now, now, Jean! Not precisely homeless, my dear girl; not homeless, you know!" protested Mr. Wolcott. "Because there would be no difficulty in having a home, when we were wealthy. Fancy the Wolcott family wealthy, Jean! Not but that it has long been my dream to make it so, and I have believed that I should, ultimately, succeed, but now the way is opened to me by an entirely unexpected path. Jean, you hardly could realize, my child, how sorry I have been to think that I was not as successful as other men in making life smooth for my dear ones. I think I remember saying something like this to you, not long ago. Now, it may be, that a stranger is going to set me in the way of doing what I desire—though later on, I can't tell how soon, but later on, I must have succeeded, in the only way I foresaw." Mr. Wolcott's animation died out toward the close of his sentence,

and his eyes took on that far-away look that his children knew so well.

Jean regarded him with dismay. She felt a surge of loving pity in the midst of the distress with which his words filled her. Dorcas was less unfitted to protect her own interests than this unworldly, childlike man !

“Father ! Why do you speak as if you were changing your mind ? As if you were half inclined to do as this Dillon wants you to do ?” she cried in distress. “You have never tolerated the idea of selling the house before—it is selling the house you meant, by what you just said ?”

“Yes, my dear, it is selling the house. I never can like the idea, you know ; the old Wolcott house ! But I see it differently ; I mean to be practical,” said Mr. Wolcott.

The mere word on his lips, wreathed with his dreamy smile, was pitifully absurd. Jean braced herself to answer, to remonstrate in effective terms.

“But, father dearest, it isn't practical to sell this house, not unless it were sold for a large sum,” she said. “The interest on three thousand dollars—that's all Mr. Dillon offered—is only a hundred and fifty dollars a year, at five per cent. You see I am getting businesslike, father !” Jean interrupted herself to laugh

and lean toward her father coaxingly, hoping that he might be pleased and surprised to find this other dreamer of the household talking sensibly, and so give her some of the loving pride and the power to influence him which that pride included, which he gave to Rodney. "How could we get as much out of a hundred and fifty dollars as this dear, queer, rambling old house gives us? Not to speak of our love for a house that has held a Wolcott ever since Braddock miscalculated so seriously?"

"Sentiment must not blind one's eyes to his best interest, my dear," said Mr. Wolcott, and Jean knew that this uncharacteristic dictum had originated in Anthony Dillon's mind, not in her father's.

"I had a short letter from mother this very morning, father. Let me read you what she happened to say about the house, now, when it is in danger. Danger she has no sort of knowledge is threatening," said Jean, her voice quivering. "You will see how she feels to this blessed old home." And she read her father the letter that she had read to Steve. "Suppose she had to be told that it was to be sold, father!" said Jean, as she ended.

"My dear little girl," said Mr. Wolcott, with great kindness, but with an air of finding Jean childish and unreasonable, "your mother is immensely practical.

All our married life it has been she, not I, who has been the burden-bearer. I seem to be unconscious of this; often I am unconscious of it, I must be honest enough to admit, but there are times when I perceive it, with great regret. If your mother were made to see that it was for the interest of her children that the old house were sold, though she might go out of it with tears, they would soon dry, for she is preëminently a devoted woman, who cares more for the welfare of her dear ones than for any other earthly object. I have considered your mother's attitude in the matter and, though I admit it would cost her something to give up this house—as it would all of us, as it would all of us!—she would be reconciled, glad of the sacrifice, if she were shown it was for the best.”

“Oh, father, maybe, but it would not be for the best; it would be a great misfortune! The money is not enough to take the place of the house,” cried Jean.

“Ah, my dear, now we are coming to the point!” cried Mr. Wolcott delightedly. “I must tell you that I am proud of my girl, proud and surprised, to find her so quick-witted, showing such excellent judgment when we thought her only a poet—and such a young poet! You are right as to the comparative value to us of the place and the sum of money which Mr. Dillon at first offered for it. *At first*, mark you, Jean! He did not

see his way, or perhaps did not think it necessary, to offer more. But he found that I was not inclined to entertain his offer, and now he offers me a share in the profits which he expects to make here ; he has confided his whole plan to me. It is an excellent plan, Jean. He proposes to build on our land a group of summer cottages, turning this old house into a communal dining-hall, on its lower floor, with its chambers rented, probably. The tenants of the cottages would use this dining-room, not cook for themselves. Mr. Dillon says that he has reasons for being certain that this enterprise would return to its stockholders at least ten per cent. on the investment. He repeats his offer to me of three thousand dollars for the place, but he also offers me a chance to 'come in on the ground floor,' as he quaintly puts it, as a stockholder in the enterprise. He compliments me, Jean, on my business astuteness in holding out for better terms. I need not tell you, my daughter, that I was doing nothing of the sort, but I am rather pleased that this sharp young man considers me less dull in business matters than Tidewater people have called me."

Jean, listening in silence, saw that this was only too true. Mr. Wolcott's pleasure in his own sharpness was so like a child's delight in reaching up to its elders that her heart smote her with fear and pity, and her wrath

burned up, justly. She hotly resented the craft that played upon this childlike nature, and she felt absolutely sure that there was actual dishonesty behind the craft.

"No honest man would need to try to trick father," she thought intolerantly. What she said, with a commendable effort to speak quietly, not to repulse her father, was: "Then you think seriously of selling, father? I wish there was any hope that you would heed me when I beg, beg you not to sell."

"Dear little Jean, a girl of sixteen, or so, is not fit to judge these questions, and you, of all girls, are least experienced in business. I think most favorably of accepting this last offer; indeed I have almost made up my mind to go in with Mr. Dillon on these latter favorable terms," said Mr. Wolcott.

Jean did not reply. She knew that protest was worse than useless; her father possessed that form of immovability that comes from inertia. He was one of those gentle people who take up a position and hold it with perfect mildness, but hold it, and who so rarely disturb themselves to the point of taking a great resolution that having taken it, they will not abandon it. When Mr. Wolcott had slowly set his mind upon a thing there it rested more firmly than the mind of a blusterer would rest.

After breakfast Jean hurriedly whisked through her morning tasks, bribing Dorcas to help her with the promise of a drive. Then she got Steve to harness Old King Cole for her and she drove away, with Dorcas, in pursuit of her step-grandmother, Mrs. Claudia Wolcott.

"Anything wrong?" demanded that vigorous lady, coming out to welcome the girls in this wise as they drove up to her door.

"Not yet, Step-grand, but there is going to be," said Jean, springing lightly over the wheel. "Dorcas, please drive around to the barn and amuse yourself a while. I came to talk business with Step-grand."

"I should as soon have looked for that statement from that patchwork kitten you call Funny," said Mrs. Claudia, but her eyes expressed the approval of Jean that her lips withheld. "Walk into my parlor, Miss Fly. I am sure that you are doomed to be the fly, if you are going to attempt business."

"I'm not so sure of that as I would have been once, Step-grand," returned Jean. "Wait till you hear my story. I think I'm an insect that doesn't appear in the poem; one that rescues the fly."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Wolcott curtly, motioning Jean to a seat in the window and giving her a huge palm-leaf fan. Then Jean told her the whole story of the menace to the old Wolcott house, from the first dawn of

her unfounded fear, to her too certain knowledge that her instinct had been true.

“Do you think I am wrong?” she ended.

“I think that you are undoubtedly perfectly right, and I am surprised and pleased to find you so wide-awake,” approved Mrs. Claudia. “But there is no need of being so frightened. Your father cannot sell the house without his wife’s consent, so there’s no occasion for anxiety. Your mother can simply refuse that consent.”

“Oh, but, Step-grand, dear, you know mother would never, never do that!” cried Jean. “Father would write her that he was determined on this step and she would never use her power to thwart him—especially as that house belonged to the Wolcott family, not to her ancestors. No matter how sure she was of its being a mistake, she would sign the deed, if father insisted, after she had tried to persuade him to keep the house.”

“Well,” admitted Mrs. Wolcott, “on the whole I suppose any decent woman would. What is it you want me to do? I know you have some sort of plan, and that I’m in it.”

“Ask father to come here to pay you a short visit,” said Jean, with the promptness of one who had laid her plan thoroughly. “Now, wait a minute, dear Step-grand! I know you are going to say it would do no good,

but it would ; it would do lots of good. First of all, it would divert father's mind from the house ; you know he is all taken up with whatever is before him at the time. Then it would keep him out of the way of Rod and this smooth-tongued young man, who is making Rod a cat's-paw for a while. And last—and this may be the best reason of all—it would give me more time to try to find out something about this Dillon."

"Well, Jean, if you keep on developing this side of yourself I shall need positive proof of your identity before I dare salute you by your name !" cried Jean's step-grandmother in high delight. "Certainly I will ask your father here. I will bid him bring his models and establish himself in my cupola. Fortunately I had a fright the other night ; a man came peering in at my window. I will ask your father to protect me." She laughed and Jean laughed with her. Mrs. Claudia was so resolute, so formidable a gentlewoman that the notion of her mild stepson as a protector for her was funny. "And after I get him here to protect me I will, secretly, protect him. Rod shall not have a chance to talk to him alone, and as to that suave outlander, whom you and I distinguished ourselves by disliking before we had any ground for it, he shall not come here at all."

"Thank you, Step-grand, dear ; I knew you'd help

me. I don't know what I should have done without you. You know how carried away father is by a new scheme, unless he is diverted, and how he forgets it when he is diverted," said Jean, rising as Dorcas skipped into the room to find out what were the prospects for going home. "I hope father will accept your invitation! I'm going right away, D."

"I wanted to start in time to go around the other way and get a boat the Lumley boy is scooping out for me," said Dorcas, swinging around Jean by a hold on her hand.

"I will put my invitation in such a way that he can't refuse," said Mrs. Claudia, replying to Jean's remark. "I made him his first knickerbockers and I used to call him Winkles—no one could disregard such a claim as that! He early formed the habit of obedience to me, besides."

"Why did you call father Winkles, Step-grand?" cried Dorcas eagerly.

"Short for Wee Willie Winkle, and I called him that because his name was Bentley," explained Mrs. Wolcott with a twinkle.

"I must hurry home, Step-grand," said Jean smiling. "Thank you a thousand times."

"Once would be too many," remarked Mrs. Claudia. "Your home was my husband's home, and I know he

would want it kept in the family. I was your grandfather's second wife, but he was not my second husband. I thought a great deal of Thomas Wolcott, your grandfather. I consider it just as much my business to look after his son and his grandchildren, and his old family place, as if I had been his first wife, and Bentley's own mother. I shall drive over this afternoon and carry off your father, neck and crop. You are a good girl, Jean, and a sensible one—to my great relief."

"I call that a doubtful compliment!" laughed Jean. "I am counting the hours till mother gets back to let me be my silly self, without any responsibility. But that doesn't mean my old selfish self, that let her do it all, Step-grand; I hope it doesn't."

"See that it doesn't! Good-bye," said Mrs. Claudia severely, but her eyes smiled at Jean.

"You must have some idea of what Step-grand and I were talking about, Dorcas," said Jean, as they drove slowly away at Old King Cole's approved pace. "But I want you to give me your word of honor that not a hint will leak out from you. Don't you let Rod guess that Step-grand and I had planned for her to ask father there."

"I'm no tattle-tale, Jean Wolcott," said Dorcas contemptuously. "I know all about it, because I'm not such a slow thing as Mellie Beal. She wouldn't know

what was going on, not if you tried the least bit to fool her—you couldn't fool me! I know Rod wants father to sell the house to Tony Dillon ——”

“Mr. Dillon,” murmured Jean, remembering her elder sisterly obligations.

“And that you don't want him to,” Dorcas went on, disregarding her. “I liked him at first, but I caught him smiling at Rod behind my back when I said something, and I don't like him any more after that. And Rod thinks he's just it; I think big boys are dreadfully conceited! And anyhow I don't want that house sold; just's if any of us would! So you needn't be afraid I'll let Rod know that you got Step-grand to ask father there. It's awfully smart of you, Jean; father will be all kind of up-set-interested, making a visit to Step-grand, and she'll keep him thinking of things, so he won't do anything, and maybe mother'll come before he gets through visiting. I think you're awfully smart to think of that, Jean Wolcott. Anyhow I wouldn't tell anything you said I was to keep, even if I wasn't on your side, like this. Because you and I are the girls of our family and we've got to stick up for each other against the boys—'cept Steve. And you've stuck up for all of us, so I wouldn't go back on you anyway, but we're sisters so I wouldn't, if it wasn't like that.”

Jean laughed till King Cole turned in the shafts to see if it was mirth or crying. "I know exactly what you mean, D., and I'm very much obliged, but I think I never in all my life heard a more mixed-up speech than that! And if we except Steve, there isn't what could be called a crowd of boys in our family for us to stand against. But you're a good little D. to be loyal to me, and I appreciate it," she said.

"You're all right, Jean, and you're getting just like Jeanne d' Arc, fighting our battles!" cried Dorcas, to whom Jean's valor appealed more strongly than her poetical, or even her domestic side.

CHAPTER XIII

JEAN, THE CONSPIRATOR

THAT afternoon Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, not being a person that delayed, descended upon the old Wolcott house prepared to accomplish an abduction. She drove herself, sitting erect in an old-fashioned carryall, capacious, competent, although it listed to one side slightly, after the fashion of the fishing schooners and sloops which glided across the sky at the edge of the horizon beyond Tidewater, and then dipped down and out into the watery world, beyond the curve of meeting clouds and sea.

“Oh me, I feel like a criminal!” sighed Jean into Steve’s ear as they watched their relative-in-law arrive.

“I don’t,” returned Steve stoutly. “It’s only a visit and father will like it; it doesn’t do anything, much, only gives us more time. He’ll be willing to go.”

“Only he won’t know why he is asked. It’s like something criminal, I can’t think what—I know! Getting goods under false pretenses!” cried Jean.

“Is father the goods?” inquired Steve. “That’s disrespectful, besides being slang.”

Jean had no chance to reply, for Mrs. Claudia was at the gate and Steve had to run out with the mannerly, but unacceptable offer to tie her horse for her.

"Is Bentley—is your father here, children?" asked Mrs. Claudia entering; she did not indulge in the slightest significant glance at Jean; she carried out her rôle even though no one but her fellow conspirators were present.

"He is up-stairs in the tower room, Step-grand," said Jean. "Shall Steve call him?"

"Please do, Stephen," returned Mrs. Claudia, and seated herself in a straight chair—she did not like rockers—remarking on the warmth of the mid-afternoon.

Steve returned with his father. Mr. Wolcott was smiling, for he was sincerely fond of his stepmother and was glad to see her, yet he looked bewildered, as he often did when summoned from his profoundest depths of dreams to the actual world, a world less real to him than that other world.

"Well, Winkles!" said Mrs. Claudia, by way of greeting, and Mr. Wolcott woke up with a start of pleased surprise. He had not heard that absurd childish nickname in years, and it brought before him, instantly, this same room, almost unchanged, with his father in the armchair yonder, and a little, wide-eyed, fair-haired boy—himself—in that window-seat beyond

the chair. The boy's nose was always buried in a book ; he was entirely happy, oblivious to his stepmother's frequent reminder : " Sit up straighter, Winkles ; you'll get completely round and the gnomes will trundle you away to use for a hoop on one of the kegs they keep in the middle of the mountains."

" Winkles, mother ? " he said, smiling, yet moved by the associations of the name. " It is long since you called me that."

" You looked so Winklesfied when you came in," explained Mrs. Claudia. " I never saw any man—not any—that kept his childhood set right in the midst of his manhood as you do, Bentley-Winkles. I suppose that is why I used the name, that, and the fact that I have come to ask you to pay me a visit ; I suppose the thought of having you with me alone again recalled your childhood." Which really was an artful way to put Mrs. Claudia's request.

" A visit ? Oh, I'm afraid that's impossible, mother," said Mr. Wolcott. " You see I am particularly interested in my work just now, particularly. For the moment, I have laid aside the air-ship rudder and am working on an idea that came—that revealed itself to me incidentally to the rudder experimenting. I think it is not impossible that I have found a way to anchor an air-ship at whatever altitude would be desired. It's a

great thing, doesn't seem possible, but yet I am inclined to believe in it. I should be afraid to leave it at its present stage. Of course I should enjoy visiting you otherwise; it is kind of you to think of it."

"Nonsense, Winkles! You know I am a selfish old body; I want you for my own benefit," retorted Mrs. Claudia. "And as to your sky anchor, who in all this world would be likely to want to anchor at an altitude? Flying would appeal to any one, I should suppose, but to be anchored aloft, like a last year's crow's nest in the top of a bare pine—— Is your idea really valuable, Bentley? However," she added hastily, forestalling his reply, which would not interest her, "you are to bring your tools and materials with you, and be installed in my cupola; you are not to cease working. But you are not to say no to me. I'll guarantee you uninterrupted days. A man came the other night peering in at the window; I'd like you in the house till I'm sure he has, as we may say, blown over—and that ought to combine well with air-ship fixing!" Mrs. Claudia laughed.

"You make it impossible for me to refuse to go to you, mother," said Mr. Wolcott, his brow wrinkling with perplexity. "I suppose I could easily transport the materials required for working out this last idea of mine. It is very valuable, very. I cannot, of course,

leave you unprotected, if objectionable persons are prowling around your house at night. I did not know there were any, what one might call prowlers, in Tidewater. You ought to let your man sleep in the house. I forget; he has a home and a family, though. What you should have done was to have stayed with me, in this house, when I married. Mary and I would have been truly glad to have had you."

"No place for stepmothers, nor mothers-in-law, nor any hyphenated ladies—not even for own mothers, as a rule, in the homes of married people," declared Mrs. Claudia. "Now, Bentley, get your belongings together and come. You can see how impatient Nebuchadnezzar is growing."

Nebuchadnezzar, so called because he ate grass, stood with his nose to the hitching-post, to which he was unnecessarily tied, resting on one side, drooping at both ends, the incarnation of indolent dullness.

Mr. Wolcott laughed. "Neb would allow me to finish anchor and rudder before I went with you, but I must not keep you waiting, though I might be justified in giving Neb more time," he said. "Jean, will you get together what I shall need in the way of clothes? You know more about them than I do, and I shall have enough to do to put more important things into—what? The little trunk?"

"I'll get the little trunk out for you, father," volunteered Steve, and hurried off to bring forth a low, soft, narrow and rounding trunk that had served Mr. Wolcott on his rare absences from home all his life.

At last the preparations for the visit were made and Mr. Wolcott, with the trunk in the rear of the carryall, the back seat perched jauntily upon it, was beside his stepmother in the front seat, and she was gathering up the reins for departure. Then, for the first time, Mr. Wolcott bethought himself of his divided duty as a protector. Leaning out of the carriage, he asked solicitously :

"Shall you be able to get on here alone, Jean ? Will Rodney and Steve be sufficient guardians for you ?"

"Oh, father, yes indeed !" cried Jean. "If I ever could wake them up they'd be splendid guardians ! I can ask Helen to stay with me, then together we could get the boys up, if there were a burglar or a fire ! We'll be as right as right can be ! 'Have a good time, Bentley, and don't go out without your rubbers if it rains.' Doesn't that make you imagine mother-darling is here to start you on your journey ?"

"The dear woman !" murmured Mr. Wolcott as Mrs. Claudia made Nebuchadnezzar move on.

"And the dear girl, Bentley !" his stepmother sup-

plemented him. "Jean is a daughter to be thankful for."

Jean went to her room and dropped into the cushions of her window that looked upon the sea. She rarely enjoyed this window of late. What a changed Jean she was ! For the unbelievable part of it was that she did not regret the life that had seemed so necessary to her, the dream days of vague ambitions and poetry, lived and made !

Out on the waves dancing toward shore, she saw Rod coming in with Anthony Dillon in the skiff. They had been perch fishing off the rocks ; Jean rightly guessed that Rod was bringing Mr. Dillon to supper, to eat their fish together, and to angle for Mr. Wolcott that evening.

"You may be able to catch perch, sir, but you won't land any bigger fish to-night, at least," said Jean aloud to the unconscious youth in the stern of Rod's skiff.

Jean noted that Rod was sufficiently enamored of his friend to feel it a privilege to do all the work, while Anthony Dillon lolled at ease in the stern, rudder ropes in hand, doing no more than enacting the rôle of figurehead, though at the wrong end of the craft.

Rod brought Mr. Dillon into the house by the rear door. He delighted Rod and exasperated Jean, while Winnie glowered, scenting that the guest was not wel-

come to her young mistress, by making himself entirely at home and helping to prepare the fish that he and Rod had caught. Usually Tidewater boys brought their friends home to supper when they had fished together, and Tidewater mothers and sisters made them welcome, overlooking the mess they made of the kitchen when they cleaned their fish for the sake of the pride and pleasure of their boys. But Anthony Dillon was not a Tidewater boy, and Jean resented his freedom with her shining knives and table.

“Father’ll like that fish, Tony,” said Rod, watching Mr. Dillon scrape a peculiarly plump perch of his own haul, which had been kept separate.

“Father is not at home, Rod,” said Jean.

“Where is he?” asked Rod sharply, and Anthony Dillon looked up quickly from his fish as if the news were not welcome.

“He has gone to visit our step-grandmother,” said Jean quietly. “She came this afternoon to fetch him. He may be gone several days; indeed he went prepared to stay. Step-grand persuaded him to take his models, his tools, or whatever he is using now. She will give him her cupola-room to work in.”

“Jean?” began Rodney, then checked himself, but that one interrogative syllable held the value of a lengthy question, supplemented by Rod’s expression.

Jean looked Rod straight in the eyes and her own eyes baffled the boy.

"Mr. Dillon wanted particularly to see him and he wanted to see Mr. Dillon to-night," said Rod frowning.

"He is at Mrs. Wolcott's, Mrs. Claudia Wolcott's; you might follow him there, if you are anxious to see him at once," suggested Jean, turning away with a fine air of indifference.

Anthony Dillon missed the force of this suggestion, not knowing Mrs. Wolcott well, nor fully understanding Jean's father, but Rod knew its value, knew that with his step-grandmother mounted as a sort of guardian dragon over her stepson's guilelessness, it would be impossible to carry it out with success. Not that Rod believed that his father was in danger of harm from his friend; the boy worshipped Dillon and believed in him; his one thought was that "Step-grand would spoil it all."

Anthony Dillon's prolonged vacation was drawing to a close; he must put through his arrangement with Mr. Wolcott at once. It was maddening to suspect that Jean, impractical Jean, had set in the way of the success of this arrangement an obstacle so simple, yet so insurmountable, for the time, as their father's present visit to his stepmother. Rodney was only a boy, although he fondly believed that he was old enough to

sit in the councils of the wise. He promptly and boyishly retaliated upon Jean for the helpless wrath which the plan that he suspected to be hers had kindled in him.

"I met Helen Lumley on the beach when we came in, Jean," he said. "She told me to tell you that she was coming to see you to-night, but her mother wants her for something, so she won't get here. I guess if you'd seen her this morning, as Tony and I did when we started fishing, you'd be glad she wasn't coming. Roger Cathcart had her out rowing!"

Dorcas tormented Jean, but she adored her big sister, nevertheless. She saw the color that flooded Jean's face as she walked with much dignity out of the room, and Anthony Dillon laughed good-naturedly, saying, "Oh, hold on, Rod; no fair teasing pretty Jean."

Dorcas knew a weak place in Rod's armor and she sent an avenging shaft into it, for Jean's sake.

"Say, Rod," said the witch-child innocently, "let me have some of that crocheted trimming you made last year when you were sick, will you? I want it for my doll."

Dorcas had the satisfaction of seeing Rod's purple blush of mortification as Anthony Dillon looked at him with a teasing laugh. She went out of the room after Jean, executing a sort of impromptu fandango of rap-

ture, knowing that her shaft had hit the vulnerable point of a big boy's shame at being caught at anything "sissy."

"I paid Rod off!" she announced, seizing Jean's arm and shaking it joyously.

"You mustn't say things to bother people, D., and I'm not fond of paying back, honey. Rod felt cross, so he tried to be mean to me, but don't you let your little tongue wound people," advised Jean, patting the child's flushed cheek to thank her for her partisanship, while she reprimanded her.

"I like paying back," said Dorcas candidly. "Not scrapping, you know; that makes you feel so horrid when you stop, but just paying back, good and sharp, and then going off, so the other one can't say anything, 'cause if he does, then you've got to go in again, or else let him have the last word, and that way you get sick of it, and real mad before you stop. I'm always awfully pleased when I've got square and scooted. I shall never be really nice, like you, Jean. I sort of enjoy myself when I'm bad, and there's no good my pretending I'm happiest when I'm nice and gentle, because I'm not, and that's the real truth."

Jean laughed and hugged Dorcas up to her. "And there's no use in my lecturing you, because you don't care, for one thing, and for another you are such an

honest, human little sinner, D., that it's hard to do it! When you grow older maybe you'll see that it's more satisfaction to get the best of yourself, and crush back the smart thing that you could have said—and hurt with—than to get the best of some one else,” said Jean.

Dorcas stopped short and looked up into Jean's face with wide-eyed amazement. “I kind of see it this minute!” she said slowly. “Isn't that the queerest! Nobody ever said it that way before! I believe it would be fun to get the best of one of yourselves with the other one! I can feel two people in me, pulling, can you, Jean? I think one is up-stairs in me and the other down-stairs. Isn't that queer? Maybe it would be just as much fun to let the up-stairs me get the best of the down-stairs me, as it would to get the best of some one outside of me. I'll try it, and find out!”

“Dorcas, you are talking—I think it is metaphysics, or psychology, or something with some big name that you never heard, and I don't feel sure about!” laughed Jean. “Of course I feel the two—at least!—different girls there are in me, having quite desperate times together, sometimes. But lately one has got the upper hand and the other—or the rest—are taking naps most of the time, outside their house, apparently.”

“You're very nice, Jean, and pleasant to talk to, now that you aren't always corked up in an ink bottle,” said

candid Dorcas, with another squeeze of Jean's arm. "I believe we shall enjoy being sisters to each other, when I'm a little bigger."

"That's a compliment!" cried Jean, with another laugh. "I see Miss Balfour, D.; she is coming here. Shall we go out to meet her?"

"There's one thing about a house facing the ocean; you almost always keep your company outside, so the ocean will entertain 'em," observed Dorcas, following Jean to the porch.

"Jean, dear, it is ever so long since I have seen you!" exclaimed Miss Balfour taking both of Jean's hands. "How well you look, child! How wide awake, alert; as if you were interested in all sorts of nice things! You are well, then?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Balfour, and I am interested in all sorts of things; they are not all nice ones, but they do wake me up," replied Jean. "I have been wishing I could tell you about the main thing, but it really would not help any, and I ought to wait now to see what next."

"You are as mysterious as an oracle, my dear!" laughed Miss Balfour. "When you are ready to tell me about anything that interests you, still more anything that might bother you, I shall be eager to hear, and to help, if I can. In the meantime, I have some-

thing to say that may interest you. No: we don't care to go into the house, do we? Shall we stay here and listen to the ocean and watch that light while we talk? I never could tire of seeing that signal flash up and die away! Now, then, little Tidewater poet, these steps are better than chairs. Here is my budget of news, all open for you to admire! I am invited to a literary luncheon in Boston this week, three days hence. I wrote to the committee arranging the affair and I have an invitation for you. I could not tell you before because I was not sure I could get it, but you certainly have a pretty little gown that will be suitable; you are so young that simple white would be the best of all. There are to be no end of literary lights shining at this luncheon. The guest of honor is ——," Miss Balfour named a successful London author, "and our Great and Near-great are coming to town to celebrate him in the delicacies of an elaborate menu. Will you go, Jean? You can go perfectly well, with your model Winnie to look after your charges for a day or two—we should have to stay over night."

"Oh, Miss Balfour, if you knew how I thanked you, thanked and thanked you! And how I'd love to go!" cried Jean. "I'd give anything to see the writers I'm fond of, and I'd probably be introduced to some one—oh, I'd love it! But I can't think of going away from

home now. I've got to say no. Don't think I'm not grateful; you can't possibly guess how I thank you, how I'd enjoy it."

"I don't want your gratitude, dear little girl; I want you!" cried Hester Balfour. "Please come with me to see how genius eats salads, ices and disports itself generally! Dorcas will keep house, won't you, Dorcas?"

"I'll keep myself, and I guess Jean thinks I'm the hardest part of the house to keep," said queer little black-eyed Dorcas. "You'd better go, Jean. Maybe you'll find out how to write a great novel; anyhow you'll have a good time, and that's enough."

"Sensible little witch-child!" approved Miss Balfour. "Say yes, Jean!"

"Miss Balfour, I couldn't go away now, unless I had to," said Jean. "I couldn't go to Boston, not unless I had to." She ended lamely in the words she had already used, her mind being filled with a renewed sense of the danger to her old home, which she must combat at short range.

Miss Balfour looked so disappointed that Jean marveled, and when, after a little further pleasant talk and another attempt to persuade Jean to accept her golden invitation, Miss Balfour went away, she left Jean cast down by her sense of loss.

CHAPTER XIV

JEAN'S CALL TO ARMS

THE next morning, early, Jean saw Miss Balfour coming up the cliff and across the dune, and with her were Helen and Roger.

“She can’t have brought them to coax me to go to Boston! As though I wouldn’t go if I could!” thought Jean. There was a tiny sense of discomfort somewhere about her as she watched her friends draw nearer. She did not pursue it to its source; if she had she would have found that Rod’s nonsense of yesterday his hint that Roger and Helen were a bit sentimental toward each other, had lurked in her memory and that she did not enjoy the suggestion. It was silly; Jean knew that. Roger was never sentimental, for one thing, and for another it had always been Jean, not Helen, whom he openly declared his allegiance to. For another thing, as Jean had impatiently told herself as she had braided her hair the night before, “she did not care, anyway.”

“Doesn’t the wind blow!” called Miss Balfour, when they had come near enough to be heard.

“Getting ready for the August storm,” returned Jean, her cloud rifting and drifting away under the magic of Miss Balfour’s great charm and the beaming smile that Roger bestowed upon her, and Helen’s clear-eyed honesty as she kissed her.

“Helen’s a duck ; I wouldn’t blame Roger for liking her best,” thought Jean cordially, affording to think it because she knew in a moment that Roger did not like Helen better than—any other girl !

“Isn’t it funny how people talk of ‘the August storm,’ or ‘the May storm’ ? I think we get hard blows and long storms in any month, and the equinoctial ! People call any rain that comes between the fifteenth of September and the middle of October the equinoctial ! How could a storm come from the sun’s crossing a line drawn by astronomers ? ”

“Why, Jean, how you chatter ! ” exclaimed Helen involuntarily. “And how red your cheeks are ! Doesn’t she look like another girl, Roger ? I was so worried when you began to do all that you are doing, for fear you’d break down, but it seems to have made you well ! Isn’t it strange that you were saying, that day when we heard your mother and her cousin talking—it seems years ago !—you were saying that some day you’d be cured by a great love ? And in an hour the trumpet call came and you —— ”

“Enlisted,” Roger interrupted. “We met Miss Balfour, Jean,” he went on, as if he did not care to discuss Jean’s achievements. “She told us about the big time in Boston she wanted you to take in. Helen and I came along with her to say we’d look after your household. Helen would stay with Dorcas and I’d stay with the boys. I suppose when we were in the house it would be hard to tell our offices apart, for we’d sit in the same rooms, but that would be the way we’d divide ourselves. Go ahead, Jean, take in that luncheon; I know it would be naphtha—I mean nectar—to you to drink muddy water at the table with a whole bunch of your pet writers!”

“Can’t be done, nice boy and girl,” said Jean, shaking her head regretfully. “Father is away now; he’s visiting Mrs. Claudia Wolcott.”

“How queer you look, Jean! What is back of that?” demanded Helen. Miss Balfour sat down on the steps, pulling off her chamois gloves, looking interested as she scented a story.

“I’m back of it, chiefly,” said Jean, blushing as she glanced at Miss Balfour. “I’ve been wishing I could tell Miss Balfour about it and I meant to get hold of Roger to-day to see what he thought of it all. Will you listen, Miss Balfour? It isn’t a long story.”

“I’d rather listen if it were, but I’ll be grateful for

being allowed to hear it, regardless of length," said Miss Balfour. "I mean of shortness."

"I have been wondering if you'd think I was wrong—and doing wrong. You know so much about business and—and everything," said Jean childishly. Then she began the story of Anthony Dillon's summer in Tidewater, of Rod's infatuation and the offer for the beloved old Wolcott place.

"It seems all wrong to me," Jean ended, "so I got my step-grandmother to persuade father to go to her. Step-grand says it is a Claudian abduction."

"It seems all wrong to me, also," said Miss Balfour, profoundly interested. "But, Jean, what good can it do to transfer your father from one Tidewater house to another? Can't your father sell the house as easily when he is visiting as when he is at home?"

"Dear me, no indeed!" cried Jean, with such fervor that Helen and Roger, knowing Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, laughed heartily. "You don't know Step-grand, Miss Balfour, and you don't know father. She will keep him interested and she will not let Mr. Dillon have a wink of chance. Father is easily diverted—but of course I am uneasy: I know it is dangerous. Father has been quite talked over by Rodney. You think the house is worth keeping, don't you?"

"I think it would be tragic to part with such a

venerable old home. There are few American houses handed down from generation to generation. But if it had to be sold, I think a site like this on the cliff, with all that before it and fourteen acres of land, is worth decidedly more than Mr. Dillon offers," said Miss Balfour, with a gesture including the outstretched expanse of sea in her estimate of the Wolcott place.

"And the shares in the future company?" suggested Jean.

"A bid in the hand is worth any number of rooms in an air castle," replied Miss Balfour briefly.

"I admire your skill in getting your father out of reach for a day or so, Jean," said Roger. "But to be truthful, I don't see what good it will do in the end."

"Only give us time. I hoped something might turn up to change father's mind back to his first opinion. If nothing happens I suppose father will want to go on with the sale, and how I shall be able to see the look in mother's eyes when she comes back I don't know—and she should have been so happy to get home!" sighed Jean.

"Steve is standing around the corner of the house, Jean," said Helen. "He is making signs to me: I think he must mean that I am to tell you to go to him, though he might mean anything else."

"Why doesn't he come here?" asked Jean. She

arose and went to the foot of the steps. "Come here, Steve," she called, beckoning. "Oh, he shakes his head as hard as he can! I suppose I must go see what's wrong, if you'll excuse me a moment, please," she added running down the narrow walk that circled the house, and joining Steve.

Helen, from where she sat, could see Steve hold out something white to Jean which she bent close to examine. Then they both started to return to the group on the steps, Steve coming with visible reluctance, Jean pressing forward eagerly.

"Steve has found something," said Jean, coming up the steps to resume her seat. "It is a bundle of letters belonging to Mr. Dillon. I can't understand why Steve thinks them important and I wouldn't let him tell me there; I wanted you all to hear. I told him I had just been letting you all into the secret of our conspiracy to spirit father out of reach."

"Where'd you find them, kid?" asked Roger, turning over the plump bundle that Steve put into his hand, a package of letters in business envelopes, all alike, held together by an elastic band.

"Out by the old well curb: Dillon and Rod washed their fish there last night," said Steve. "I expect him every moment to ask if we've found them."

"Dillon?" asked Roger. "Well, what about it if

he does come and ask for them? I'm like Jean: I can't see anything in finding a bundle of letters; what's supposed to come of it?"

"Where are your eyes, Roge?" asked Steve. "Just spread those letters out and see if you notice anything queer about them. I had them out of the band and laid 'em in a row: try it and see how they look to you."

"What is it?" asked Jean. She and Helen and Miss Balfour leaned toward Roger as he slipped the rubber band over his finger and laid the letters out on his knees.

"They are all from one firm in Boston, Stewart, Reed & Company. And they are all redirected from Kennebunkport, Maine. That is a little queer!"

"Why, it's more than a little queer, Jean!" cried Steve, warming into rare excitement, speaking with none of his usual deliberation. "Look at the post-marks of those letters. How long has Dillon been hanging around here? Shouldn't you think that firm, if they had to write him as often as this, would have been told his right address before this time?"

"Dillon came here in May—this is August—one in May, seven in June, nine in July, four, so far, this month—— Look here, Steve, you aren't so dead slow after all!" cried Roger. "It was rather clever of you

to have seen this so quickly. Here's a fairly rapid correspondence, and this Mr. Dillon does not correct the impression which these people have that he's down in Maine all this time ! Something funny about it."

"I don't believe people do queer things without queer reasons," cried Jean, while at the same instant Helen said :

"It is strange, but it may not mean anything except that Mr. Dillon is careless."

"Now you're talking, Sis !" cried Steve, replying to Jean's remark. "A fellow wouldn't be as careless as that, not with an address for a lot of business letters, Helen. Besides, Jean and I don't trust Dillon and I believe this letter twistiness gives away some trick, only we haven't the clue to what it is."

"That's just it ; we haven't the clue, Steve !" said Jean, turning over one of the letters wistfully. "So it doesn't give away a thing, except that Anthony Dillon isn't—or very likely isn't—straight. If only we knew what was in the letters !"

"But we can't look at them, Jean, no matter how bad we want to, or why," said Steve, as quickly as if he feared for the stability of his sister's principles.

"Don't you worry, Steve ; I won't turn rogue, though it does take a rogue to catch one, and though we're

wild to find out about Rod's friend," Jean laughed. "Miss Balfour, what do you think of it—anything? You haven't said one word."

"I certainly think it looks suspicious, but nobody could know what to suspect," returned Miss Balfour. "I know—I used to know quite well the junior member of that firm of Stewart, Reed & Company—it was the 'and Company' whom I knew. I could solve the mystery, if there be one—and if I could! If I still knew the 'and Company,' I mean."

"You couldn't renew the acquaintance, could you?" hinted Roger, looking at Miss Balfour with half sympathetic, half laughing eyes betraying that he had caught the meaning underlying Miss Balfour's words, to which Jean was entirely oblivious.

Miss Balfour shook her head, returning Roger's look with a kind of humorous melancholy.

"Barriers in the air are quite insurmountable," she said. "I'm sorry."

"It surely is a pity not to get more out of this blind clue," said Jean, who had pursued her own thoughts in the meantime. "I know!" she cried springing to her feet under the impetus of a swift inspiration, and sending several of the letters scurrying to the ground. "Why did none of us think of it before? I've been wishing I could find out some one who knew Mr. Dillon

and here they are ! ” She tapped the firm name in the corner of the envelope triumphantly.

“ I will go to Boston this afternoon. I will stay over night at that quiet little hotel where mother always stays, and to-morrow morning I will present myself respectfully at the office of Stewart, Reed & Company. I will drop a meek little curtsey in the doorway, and I will say : Please, Mr. Stewart, Reed & Company, and do you know Mr. Anthony Dillon, and would you mind telling me whether he is a rascal, as Steve and I think he is ? Or words to that effect, you know.”

“ Jean, you wouldn't do that ! ” cried Helen.

“ Not precisely,” laughed Jean. “ That would be the spirit, not the letter of my speech.”

“ Oh, I didn't mean that nonsense ! I mean you wouldn't really go to Boston and go to that office and ask about Mr. Dillon ? How could you ? ”

“ Just go,” said Jean calmly. “ I certainly mean it. I wouldn't have to explain much if I found they thought it all right for him to be here when they thought he was in Maine. Then I'd simply say he had talked of buying our house and I had come to ask—no, not that ! Well, some little explanation would do, and then I'd go away. But if I found something queer in the air I could feel my way along farther. Don't be afraid,

Helen ; I won't do anything rash, nor unladylike ! Wouldn't you go, Miss Balfour, Roger ? ”

“ Yes, I would,” said Roger. “ Maybe I ought to go down with you, see you through.”

“ Goodness, how could you ? ” cried Jean.

“ Unfortunately, Roger Cathcart, you nice boy, that would demand still another as chaperon to you two youngsters,” said Miss Balfour. “ I would go, Jean ; I think your plan is admirable, and that you will instinctively say the right thing when you get there. I shall go down with you. Not on your errand to that office, though if my hands weren't tied I could be useful to you there. But I'll go with you to Boston, and you shall stay with me, and I hope you'll like that better than being alone in a hotel, like a tiny kummel seed in a big cake ! It is only anticipating my going to town for the luncheon. By the way, Jean, you said you could not leave home to go to that luncheon, yet off you fly as lightly as milkweed down at the first—other—provocation ! ”

“ Oh, I know, Miss Balfour ! But can't you see ? I couldn't go away for pleasure, but I must go, because I ought. You know I'd love the luncheon best of anything I could do ! ” cried Jean, feeling that Miss Balfour was only teasing, yet distressed by the possibility of her misunderstanding.

"I know, Jean child! I understand," Miss Balfour, seeing this, reassured her. "After all, Puritan inheritance comes out—duty first, and pleasure, maybe, not at all! But I admire the capacity to choose an 'ought' instead of a 'would.' I suspect lots of the harmful social conditions we deplore come from people trying to please themselves instead of doing their hard duty. Will you let me go down with you this afternoon, then, Jean?"

"Doing a hard duty?" hinted Jean slyly.

"No, you saucy girl! I'm not of Puritan ancestry like you; I want to go!" cried Miss Balfour.

"I think it would be so kind of you that I'm afraid to let you go. But I'd be a happy girl if you were going, and didn't mind it," said Jean, with sudden shyness.

Hester Balfour, the story writer, had long been her admiration: Hester Balfour, the lovable, charming woman, just enough older than herself to tower above the girl in this capacity, as she did in her public one, was secretly enshrined as an idol in Jean's hero-worshipping heart.

"That's settled, then," said Miss Balfour.

"It's worth trying, Jean, this scheme of yours," said Roger, rising as Miss Balfour arose.

"I should say it was," said Steve, speaking for the

first time; he had stood, beaming, crimson under his tan, from the strength of his silent approval of his sister's energy. "You can just ask these people if they know Dillon, and whether he is responsible, or anything like that. Maybe they'll tell you something, and maybe they won't, but I'll bet you'll get at something! I'll take you to the station and meet the last train tomorrow—I suppose you'll come up on that?"

"Unless I'm detained; then I'll telegraph you, Steve. I must fly around to get ready for the 2:57. We must take that, Miss Balfour, you know. Helen, will you help me get ready? Can you stay here to-night with Dorcas? Will you keep house here for twenty-four hours? Winnie makes it easy enough."

"Of course I will; I meant to," said Helen.

"Helen, you always make me feel as though Gibraltar had obligingly slipped loose, and had sailed over the ocean for me to lean on!" cried Jean.

"What shall I do, Jean?" asked Roger mournfully. "I'd like to be a sort of Gibraltar pebble myself, but I don't see any opening for a nice young man in this firm."

"There's no opening for any other sort of a young man—look how hard Mr. Dillon has tried!" laughed Jean, regarding Roger as she spoke. "You do look clean and honest, sir! Then you may spend the even-

ing with my brothers, Rod and Steve, and play with them, just as you said you would, if I were going to the luncheon."

"Hard matter to play with Rod lately," said Roger. "Steve, will you take me in?"

"Sure thing," said Steve. "You're all right, Roger."

"So are you, Stephen Wolcott," said Jean warmly. "If anything should come of my trip, it would be you who found the letters and first noticed their queer address."

"'Twould be anyhow," remarked Steve, walking away, pleased with Jean's praise, but objecting to it before Miss Balfour.

"Oh, Steve, you take charge of these letters and give them back to Mr. Dillon yourself, will you?" Jean called after him.

"We'll meet at the train, Jean," said Miss Balfour, moving toward the gate.

"There's the messenger from the station; he is probably bringing a telegram," said Helen, as the bent form of the venerable telegraph messenger, whom Tidewater employed through pity, came laboriously along the cliff.

"Oh, Helen!" cried Jean. A telegram stopped her heart beats now that her mother was away.

“Steady, Jeannie; I’m expecting an earldom telegraphed me from England,” said Roger.

But the aged messenger, disregarding the rest, went straight to Miss Balfour. “You wasn’t at the Cliff House; I went there first,” he said, as if she needed her whereabouts made clear to herself. “It’s a quarter for one delivery; you might as well say I delivered this one twict,” he added.

“Thank you,” said Hester Balfour, giving the poor old fellow a bright half dollar. She tore open the dispatch and read it, crumpled it in her hand, and turned to Jean, flushed, annoyed, yet happy. “Oh, Jean dear, I can’t go with you!” she cried. “I shall even have to give up the luncheon—unless you will stay in town and take my place, pretending to be Hester Balfour,” she added laughing. “I have a novel, my first novel, coming out this fall, and the publishers and I have been discussing a change in it. They have telegraphed me to make it. I must work day and night for the rest of this week. I am so sorry, dear, to let you go alone.”

“I am sorry, too,” said Jean, showing plainly that this was true. “But I never thought of anything else, till you spoke of going, so it is the same in the end. I won’t be afraid. A novel, Miss Balfour? Isn’t that wonderful? Yet I’m so sorry you must miss the luncheon!”

"So am I, but you know one's first novel absorbs everything else. Can't you imagine how interested I am in making the change in it, little sister Author?" asked Miss Balfour.

"Of course I can!" cried Jean. "Good-bye. Thank you ever so much for meaning to go with me. It seemed too good to happen. I shall not be afraid. I shall keep thinking about that novel and how you are working on it, all the way on the train. It is lovely to know you are doing it in Tidewater. I always dreamed that some day I'd be where really gifted people were writing and painting, and I'd know them. And now I am, and I do!"

"You dear little soul," laughed Miss Balfour, coming back to kiss Jean on both her burning cheeks. "Don't you ever suspect that pictures and poetry and stories are made where there are no people working with artists' tools, nor who are labeled artists?"

CHAPTER XV

JEAN'S BOLD PLUNGE

JEAN and Helen got into a wild hurry of preparation after they were left alone. They discovered that there was not much time in which to get ready, or that they thought there was not. Jean was unaccustomed to going away, and she never before had gone away from home without her mother, so that valuable time was wasted discussing what was necessary to take. Though she was intending to return the following afternoon, still it did not seem quite prudent to go away with only one fresh blouse to replace the one she wore. When she and Helen got through packing Jean's suit-case was heavy with the superfluous articles, taken "in case of"—something highly improbable—happening.

Winnie came up-stairs to survey the littered room with solemn, round eyes.

"Winnie, you will take good care of everything and everybody, won't you?" begged Jean.

"Down to the two cats, Miss Jean," said Winnie. "It is a great thing to go to Boston, isn't it, miss? It takes such a deal of turning out."

Winnie regarded the bed and chairs without a glimmer of the satire of which Jean suspected her.

"I don't think Tidewater people consider it a great event to go to Boston, Winnie, but I decided suddenly and I wasn't ready—and I hardly know what to take," said Jean.

"My mother lived with a baronet's lady at home in England," said Winnie. "I've heard her tell that when that Lady Renstone got called to this country sudden to see her brother dying out on a farm—which they called a wrench—in Arizona, America, which I think is not within some miles of here, she took six clean blouses and two skirts, and six of everything you wear under such, and a revolver against robbers and other wild creatures, and set sail, bold as you please, for distant shores, having had but three hours to get ready in before she went by the Midland railway up to Liverpool, where she took ship—and so did my mother and I when we sailed."

"I'm not a baronet's lady, Winnie, and I'm inexperienced," pleaded Jean. "But then I haven't taken six of anything for this trip, nor a revolver! And it takes nearly as long to go to Arizona from here as it does to go to Liverpool. And those farms are called ranches, not wrenches, though I've no doubt your name would suit lots of them."

“I make no doubt, Miss Jean; thank you,” said Winnie, still with unmoved gravity. “And far be it for me to say you are not making no more preparations than you have to. I’ll set your room tidy after you’re out of it, so don’t bother to pick up after yourself. Nor, Miss Jean, take heed to this household after you are out of it, though soon you will return and be welcome to it all, for I shall faithfully do all that I know to be right, nor should it be as if the family was yet in arms, Dorcas being old enough to be left without a strict guardian, if she puts her mind on not needing one.”

“Oh, I’m not going to worry one bit about anything here, Winnie. I am more inclined to worry about the little Wolcott girl who is going away!” laughed Jean.

“I am sure no harm will overtake you, Miss Jean, and horrible indeed would it be to think otherwise. Your lunch is ready and Master Stephen says that it would be best to take it immediately, as Old King Cole will not hasten for so little a thing as a railway train—that was Master Steve’s message,” said Winnie.

“That sounds like his message,” said Jean. “We’ll be right down; I’ve only to put on my hat and find the mate to my glove, then I’m ready.”

The lunch was a rapid one, from the necessity of King Cole’s gait, and Jean’s part of it was slight.

Rodney, who had been lunching with one of the other boys, came in just as the others arose from the table ; he had heard from Winnie that Jean was going to Boston, and he came in with a look of glum curiosity on his face.

“What on earth has started you off to Boston in such a rush, Jean ?” Rod asked suspiciously. “You’re up to something ; I’ve known it ever since father went off, and now here’s another thing ! It’s no good, Jean ; you’re ——”

“No good, too ?” interrupted Jean. “Or do you mean I’m up to something that’s going to fail ? I’m up to no bad, that’s certain, and as to the rest—time will show what fails and what succeeds. I’m ready if you are, Steve ; I’m afraid I’ll miss the train. Good-bye, Rod dear ; it’s horrid to have you take the tone you do to me lately. I’m not cross with you, because we don’t see things alike. Let’s be friends, Rod !”

“Oh, we’re friends right enough, only you can’t expect me not to stand up for my real friends,” began Rod, when Jean, putting her arm over his shoulders, asked :

“Aren’t we real friends ?”

“Oh, fiddlestrings ! Aren’t you my sister ? Good-bye, then ; take care of yourself,” said Rod impatiently, withdrawing from Jean’s arm.

“Good-bye, Dorcas baby! And mind, D. dear: No pranks! Do as Helen asks you to do. It’s honor bright, you know; you promised!” said Jean, hugging Dorcas.

“Well, don’t I know I promised?” cried Dorcas. And Jean felt no more misgivings about Dorcas, for, madcap though she was, she never broke her word.

Old King Cole took Jean and Steve along the dusty road with dignity, and they made the train by a slight margin, thanks to their correct gauging of his speed.

“Don’t let Rod guess my errand, Steve,” Jean needlessly cautioned the boy as they pulled up beside the platform.

To which Steve made no reply beyond a look that eloquently asked Jean’s opinion of his intellect. She laughed and kissed him heartily; Steve was her rock amid the family shoals in which she was then floundering. Jean went around the corner of the little red station—and there was Roger!

“I came to wish my plucky little schoolmate good luck,” Roger said, contriving to take both of Jean’s hands in spite of her suit-case. “I’m pretty sure you’re going to find out something worth knowing about that slick, slippery chap. It’s a shame there’s nobody but you to do it! Yet nobody else could do it better than you will, I’m sure of that! I wish I could go with

you and see you through, but as I can't, here's hoping! Mother would have gone with you, if she had known in time that you were going; she told me to say so. I told her your errand; mother's safe enough, you know. And she thinks it's great; she's quite excited, knows just how your mother would feel if she knew about it. She told me to say that she sent your mother's love and blessing to you, that you were a great little daughter! You'll be all right, Jean. By the great horn spoon! Give me a poetess, after all, for sheer, clear, practical, courageous common sense!"

Jean's face glowed under Roger's encouragement and her eyes filled at Mrs. Cathcart's message. It steadied her nerves and warmed her heart, so that she no longer feared nor doubted. Mrs. Cathcart was the best friend her mother had in Tidewater and Jean felt as though her mother actually had sent her girl a message by her.

Roger got Jean's ticket and put her on the train, which halted long enough to allow him to do so, but not much longer. He stuck her ticket into the corded back of the seat before her, put her suit-case up in the rack, half crushed her hands in a farewell clasp of admiring encouragement, then risked his neck by jumping from the moving train to wave his hat at her in the window as she rolled slowly past him. And after she had passed beyond the sight of him, Jean found in

her lap, fresh and dewy amid the dusty heat of the car, a bunch of forget-me-nots that Roger, unpoetic Roger, had dropped there.

A long, tiresome, dusty ride it was from Tidewater to Boston that afternoon, with the burning rays of the August sun resting directly on Jean's side of the car, heating it, in spite of the drawn shade, which excluded air as well as sunshine. They made slow progress through the flat country of the shore region, stopping at the smallest stations with the exaggerations of the most accommodating of accommodation trains.

But at last back yards began to cease to be isolated, and to grow together into the communal solidity of wall-divided rows. The washing, which in tenements seems incapable of drying on Monday, but is week-long in the public eye, garnished their small inclosures. In the spaces between the brick houses boys were playing ball, regardless of the heat, in fields productive of cans and outworn shoes. Bill-boards in increasing numbers, as well as utilized wall spaces, advised the arriving traveler where the best articles to satisfy all possible desires, from pickles to pianos, could be found in Boston.

With the eager nervousness of the unaccustomed traveler, Jean preened herself for flight almost at the first of these symptoms of approach. She had her

umbrella in her hand, and her jacket on her arm before the outermost rim of the felly which encompasses the Hub of the Universe had been reached.

At the great terminal station Jean made her way out amid the line of her fellow passengers, past the clamoring row of cabmen, to the sidewalk. Jean's memory of the car which her mother had taken to get to the hotel on her rare visits to Boston was clear. It enabled her to await its coming without inquiry as to which of the many electric trolleys that rattled by the station was the right one for her destination. She boarded her car confidently, and it justified her confidence by voluntarily halting directly before the door which she wished to enter.

Jean felt decidedly youthful, like a little girl who had come away from home without permission, as she asked the clerk behind the impressive and oppressive desk to assign her a room. That dignitary did not appear to suspect a truant in the preternaturally dignified girl before him: Jean's outward dignity was commensurate with her inward tremors, which it was intended to disguise.

"No. 342: be good enough to register, madam," the clerk said, pushing toward Jean the great book of identities.

Jean signed her name and followed the tall boy in

the gray braided uniform, who took the key from the clerk, and Jean's suit-case from the floor, and led the way to the elevator. The boy conducted Jean around the first bend on the third floor, after they got out of the elevator, unlocked the door of Jean's room and left her, looking disgusted, for unaccustomed Jean had no dime ready for his expectant hand.

Tossing her hat, jacket and umbrella on the bed, Jean dropped into the rocking-chair by the window and looked out on the quiet side street, with its uniform row of bow-fronted brick houses and its red brick pavement. It looked warm on such a day as this and presented irregularities of surface to unwary or unaccustomed feet.

"I shall start out as early in the morning as I can," thought Jean. "Perhaps I shall get time for a peep into the library. I wonder if the number of *Guernsey's Magazine* that had my verses in it is in the reading-room still? How lovely to have one's poem in the Boston Public Library! Oh, suppose some day I should have a book on its shelves!" For a few moments Jean lost herself in the maze of this absorbing thought. Then she impatiently aroused herself from a relapse into her old dreams, and turned her thoughts toward the task on which she had come. Roger's forget-me-nots made a patch of blue on the white cloth on the

dresser ; they reminded her of the manly young fellow and of how good he had been to her in starting, what courage he had infused into her frightened heart. She felt sure that Roger would say that it was better to have come down to Boston all alone, to try to help her father to avoid a mistake, than it would be to have a book on the shelves of the Boston Public Library.

“ Why not both ? ” thought Jean, divesting herself of her white blouse and getting on her dressing sack to shake down over it her masses of fine brown hair, which she herself disapproved as being “ everybody’s color,” but which those who loved her found beautiful in its lustrous depth of color and silken fineness.

Jean wound the soft hair into place around her head : it crowned her abundantly. Then she put on the soft white gown which she had brought to dine in, and went down to dinner early, partly to avoid the more crowded later hours in the room which she must enter alone, and partly to give herself a glimpse of the city before it was too dark to venture on the streets unaccompanied.

Jean asked to be seated at a small table where an elderly woman, with severe gray hair, in a silken gown of the same color, eye-glasses and a steel trimmed bag, sat dining alone, also. She was uncommunicative, not to say forbidding, but Jean felt as safe at her table as she would have with a granite monument set over her

—which this stone-colored lady somewhat resembled—and she ate as good a dinner as her slight appetite allowed under this negative protection.

After dinner Jean went to walk, but there was not much pleasure in solitary exploring at an hour when those who were similarly bent were companioned. Jean found Commonwealth Avenue and wandered slowly down to the Public Garden, where she spent a quiet hour among the richness of its blossoms and spreading trees. But she was glad to return to the hotel early and to fall asleep to gain strength and courage for an enterprise that looked more and more dismaying the nearer its hour came. The sunshine which she had neglected to exclude awakened Jean in her eastward room by five o'clock, which is a weary hour to awaken in an unfamiliar city, where one is alone. Jean tried to coax back sleep, but it had flown. She wrapped herself picturesquely in a light quilt that had lain across the foot of her bed and sat by the window, her head on her arms, looking absently at the sleeping houses opposite and picturing the glorious burst of light that moment as the sun shone low over the ocean before the casement window of her room at home. Tidewater seemed far away, and already lost to her.

“I suppose I'm hungry,” said Jean to herself, which showed that she had learned to attribute emotions to

their frequent cause—physical conditions—and not only to great mental and moral upheavals, as she would once have done.

“East rooms are best to sleep in,” said Jean aloud, grateful for the touch of the sun’s warm hand, like a friendly caress on her cheek. “I like to be at the beginning of the day. I’m like Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat, who ‘high in a tower toward the east guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot.’ I’ve no shield, but—maybe I’m the knight instead of the lily maid; I’d rather be. I mean to be my mother’s knight to-day, though I am her daughter and not her son.”

The fancy pleased Jean and she began to hum to herself a droning little tune, somewhat like a contented bee in the sunshine, and at last she fell into a light doze, from which she awakened to find that it was after six.

Jean had determined on breakfasting at half-past seven, for, though she wanted to get to the office of Stewart, Reed & Company as early as she could, in order to be sure of returning to Tidewater that afternoon, she knew that nine o’clock was as soon as she might hope to find the firm ready to be visited. So she dawdled over her bath and dressing, and then over her breakfast, consuming so much time that, when she returned to her room at half-past eight, she got into a

small panic of fear that she should be late, and flurried and hurried her hat and coat and gloves on, and rushed down the hall to the elevator and breathlessly took a car, all in such a short space of time that she actually reached Boylston Street, where Stewart, Reed & Company's offices were, at a quarter to nine.

"Dear me! How can people run railroads when it's so hard to get one girl running on schedule time!" she thought whimsically. "Perhaps it won't matter; perhaps this is an early firm. The early firm catches the bird; Rod always says I'm a bird when he's severely sarcastic! Jean Wolcott, you are scared! When you're scared you always get feeble-minded and think in nonsense that isn't clever, but tries to be. Now, I'm not going to let myself get into a funk!"

There was some ground for Jean's accusing herself of terror; she had walked past the general doorway of the building which sheltered Stewart, Reed & Company, in order to give herself more time to pluck up heart. She was overwhelmed, on the eve of her interview, with a realization of what an unusual thing she had done. It was strange to come here to ask of these men, on whom she had no claim, information as to Mr. Dillon, who, judging by the frequency of their letters to him, must be a friend, or a business associate of theirs. And how should she get about her task? What should she

say? Just what did she want to ask? Something that could not be put into words: Whether or not Anthony Dillon was a rascal! Certainly she had undertaken a difficult bit of diplomacy! She had never been inside a great office building like this one: its impressive entrance paralyzed her. How could she ever open one of its office doors and walk in, facing men who would, at the least, think her intrusive and probably silly?

Poor Jean loitered with trembling knees and suffocating heart beats slowly onward, down Boylston Street, trying to master her deadly, gripping fear. Then the thought of that morning recurred to her, that she, though a girl, must be her mother's knight. The title of that poem which she had never written, "The Accolade of Courage," crossed her mind, with its one line that had come to life:

"Courage, the king, hath touched me with his sword."

Jean pulled herself together. "Yes," she thought, "I'm going to believe that I have received an accolade to be my mother's knight. That the king has sent me on this quest. And afterward I'll go to the library and see Abbey's pictures of the quest of the Holy Grail! Come, Jean Wolcott, do what you came to do and do it well! It can't be so very awful, and if you fail no

one will be the worse for it. This office building isn't an ogre's den!"

With a mental shake, Jean turned right about face, retraced her steps and passed under the tall white portal that was the introduction to Stewart, Reed & Company's domain. The office directory in the lower hall informed her that the firm she was seeking was domiciled on the fourth floor. Thither she repaired under the elevating guidance of an ebony youth who ran the electric lift, and who when he reached her floor almost forgot to move the throttle of the car to its checking notch, so interested was he in his single passenger of that trip up. Jean noted and wondered at this interest: she did not realize how unusual an experience it was to the negro boy to find in his car a fair and slender young creature, with cheeks flushed by Tidewater's sea winds, and with the dreams of the sea in her wide-open gray eyes.

"Your floor, four' floor, miss," said the smiling elevator boy and Jean stepped forth.

No more turning back, no more hesitancy now: she had arrived! For straight in front of Jean as she left the elevator was the name of Stewart, Reed & Company, in black letters on an opaque glass door, and thither she bent her steps.

CHAPTER XVI

JEAN'S COURAGE

JEAN hesitated before the office door for a moment, uncertain as to the etiquette of office visiting. Should she regard it as a private apartment, and knock, or as a public place, like a shop, and walk in?

She decided that an office was open to the public; she turned the knob of the door and entered, standing hesitant upon the threshold, just inside the door. There were several clerks in this outer office, two of whom looked up when Jean opened the door, and, seeing the unexpected apparition of a young and pretty girl, one of them arose and came forward, to offer her assistance politely.

"May I see Mr. Stewart, or Mr. Reed? Or any one belonging to the firm?" asked Jean, devoutly hoping that she should know what to say to one of these gentlemen when she saw him.

"Mr. Reed is out of town. Mr. Stewart is here, but —— Will you give me your card? He may see you," said the clerk.

"He would not know my name. Ask him, if you please, if he will be kind enough to give me a few moments. I am Miss Wolcott, but I do not live in Boston; he would not know me," said Jean, her courage rising now that her adventure was under way.

"Sounds like a book agent, or a charity collector, yet she looks like nothing but a mighty sweet girl," thought the clerk. He wisely kept this impression to himself, and, first offering Jean a chair, he departed to the inner office to try to persuade his chief to set aside his rule and see this unknown caller.

He was successful. Returning, he courteously bade Jean follow him. He ushered Jean into the private office and withdrew. Jean found herself facing an elderly man with a stern expression, greatly increased by the bushy gray eyebrows which presided formidably over the aquiline nose.

"Mr. Stewart?" murmured Jean, faintly interrogatory.

"Be seated, Miss ——" Mr. Stewart motioned to a chair and paused for Jean to supply the name he lacked.

"Wolcott. I am Jean Wolcott, but that does not tell you anything," said Jean.

Mr. Stewart shook his head. "You came on business, Miss Wolcott?" he hinted.

Jean reminded herself of her own mental instructions to be brief and businesslike. "I came to ask you, Mr. Stewart, if you knew a young man called Anthony Dillon?" she said.

"Yes, I know him," said Mr. Stewart, bringing the heavy brows frowningly together and scrutinizing Jean from beneath their ambush.

"Would you mind telling me if you know him well? Is he—do you think him—well, is he reliable?" Jean faltered, blushing furiously, for the keen, steady gaze of those eyes under the cliffs of eyebrows was most disconcerting.

"H'm!" the old gentleman cleared his throat, noting the blush and embarrassment of the girl and entirely misconstruing Jean's symptoms. "Mr. Dillon is a clever and reliable *clerk*; I cannot tell you anything about him in his social relations, Miss Wolcott."

Jean straightened herself, seeing that the old gentleman suspected her of a girlish personal interest in the impressive Anthony Dillon.

"I am not interested in Mr. Dillon's social relations, sir," she said quickly. "It was his business reliability I meant. I should like very much to know whether you think he can be trust—depended upon?"

"These are singular questions to be propounded by a slip of a girl like you to an old man like me, and one

whom she has never seen before, Miss Wolcott, permit me to suggest. If I did not consider Mr. Dillon trustworthy should I be likely to employ him?" asked Mr. Stewart testily.

"Oh, you do employ him!" cried Jean, surprised into unconsciousness of Mr. Stewart's annoyance.

"Mr. Anthony Dillon has been the confidential clerk of Stewart, Reed & Company for more than five years," said Mr. Stewart, rising as if to indicate that the interview was at an end. "I am afraid, Miss Wolcott, that unless you can give me an excellent reason for inquiring about Mr. Dillon, I shall have to beg to be excused from discussing him. I regret that Mr. Dillon is not here to answer for himself, if there is any reason why you should ask questions about him. Mr. Dillon has been given a vacation of four months—which is enough to show you that we appreciate his work for us—and is now at Kennebunkport, Maine."

"At Tidewater, Massachusetts," Jean corrected him, looking up into his face as she kept her seat.

"Eh? What's that you say? Mr. Dillon is in Maine," said the old gentleman sharply.

"Pardon me," said Jean, speaking quietly, though her heart beat hard as she found herself getting on the trail. "Mr. Dillon has been in Tidewater since May. I live there."

Mr. Stewart touched a button on the wall and a boy responded.

"Ask Mr. Carew to come here. And bring me that map of the Massachusetts coast that I had made last year: Mr. Carew will know which one, if you don't," Mr. Stewart said to the boy. Then, while Jean sat wondering what was to happen, Mr. Stewart silently paced the floor, frowning heavily and utterly ignoring her, till the boy returned, carrying a large roll, and closely followed by a man in the early thirties, whose face invited confidence.

"This is Mr. Carew, the junior member of the firm, Miss Wolcott. Mr. Carew, this is Miss Wolcott, of whom I know nothing more than that she appeared from—she says—Tidewater, inquiring of me as to the character of Anthony Dillon."

Mr. Stewart unrolled the great map by hanging it on a hook in the wall and letting it drop to its length. He rested his finger upon Tidewater and the cliff where the Wolcott house stood. The map comprised only that part of the coast a few miles either side of Tidewater, and was drawn to a large scale.

"Miss Wolcott, do you happen to know this neighborhood?" Mr. Stewart asked.

"Our house stands there, my father's house, the one Anthony Dillon is trying to buy," cried Jean.

Mr. Carew started and the senior and junior partners exchanged glances.

“Miss Wolcott says that Dillon has been down at Tidewater for months, since May in fact; that means all the time since he went on his vacation,” said Mr. Stewart. “When I heard her name it did not occur to me to connect her with the Wolcott house in Tidewater. She came here to inquire about Anthony Dillon. Perhaps you would better begin at the beginning and tell us your reasons for being interested in this young man, Miss Wolcott.”

“Anthony is in Maine,” protested Mr. Carew, in a puzzled way. “You say he wants to buy that old Wolcott house at Tidewater? Dillon?”

“Mr. Dillon has been in Tidewater since May,” repeated Jean. “He came to me—I am keeping house this summer, because my mother is ill at a sanitorium—and he wanted me to let him board with us. Of course I couldn’t think of it; I didn’t know how to keep house when I began. After that Mr. Dillon made a great deal of my brother Rodney. Rod is only a little past fifteen and he was flattered by Mr. Dillon’s notice; he is all wrapped up in him now. This brought Mr. Dillon to our house a great deal. Father likes to talk to him. Father is a dear, dreaming father, busy inventing air-ship rudders and anchors and no end of

things ; they are all going to make our fortune—dear father ! Mr. Dillon has been very nice in getting father to tell him about these things and father likes him, too. Rod is infatuated with him ! I never could endure Mr. Dillon, and Steve, the younger boy, feels as I do. Mr. Dillon first talked to Rod about selling the old house ; he told him it was wrong to hold it, and after he had made Rod believe that it would be a fine thing for us to sell our home, he began to talk about it to father. Father was not enough interested in money to heed what Mr. Dillon said about the gain he would make in selling the old place ; it had no effect at all on father—at first ! Then Mr. Dillon offered Rod a share in the stock, or something like that—it may have been a commission—if he would get father to sell. When Rodney told me that I hated it. It seemed to prove me right in distrusting Mr. Dillon—to offer a bribe to a boy to get him to manage his own father into doing something he didn't approve ! ”

Jean paused, breathless. Mr. Stewart regarded her gravely, but with new and kindly interest. “ I do not understand, my dear child,” he said. “ Stock in what did Mr. Dillon offer this boy ? ”

“ In the Land Improvement Company he purposed starting on the Tidewater coast ; he had planned to put up houses for a summer colony on our land,” said Jean.

“ Ah ! ” breathed Mr. Stewart, while, at the same instant, Mr. Carew cried :

“ Impossible ! ”

“ Impossible for this child to have mistaken anything so definite,” murmured Mr. Stewart.

“ I didn’t like the idea of offering Rod a bribe, not one bit,” Jean resumed her story as the two gentlemen waited for her to go on. “ But Rod did not succeed in earning it by convincing father. Then, just when I thought all danger was over, Mr. Dillon made father much fonder of him, and then he offered to admit father as a sort of partner in the scheme—when he would not sell, you see!—and father has risen to that bait and has almost made up his mind to sell on the new terms. I have been dreadfully worried about it. I know how bad it would be for us to sell that lovely old place for three thousand dollars, with a share in a company that may not be any good at all. And I know how mother would feel to come home to any other house. My mother is getting better and it may not be long before she is able to come home ! ” Jean smiled so joyously at her hearers that they instantly shared her irresistible happiness in that announcement. “ Steve and I tried to see some way to coax father not to sell, but we couldn’t. Then yesterday Steve—that’s the thirteen-year-old boy—found a bundle of letters which

Mr. Dillon had dropped. Steve brought them to me—I had three friends there—and we looked at the letters only at the outside, of course, but we saw what Steve had been bright enough to see at once, and that was that every single letter had been sent to Kennebunkport and readdressed to Tidewater, and that they were all from one firm; this one. Steve saw in an instant, and we all saw it too, that it was strange that any firm should have to write one man so often and for so long, and not know his right address. If we hadn't been wishing we had some proof that we were right not to trust Mr. Dillon I suppose we should not have thought so much about it, but Steve and I were wild to get hold of something that should turn father and Rod from him. So I said I'd come straight here and see if I could find out if there were anything wrong, or not. I'm going home this afternoon." Jean ended her story with a gasp and fell back in her chair, suddenly realizing what a long story it had been and that neither of her hearers had interrupted her by a syllable.

"Incredible!" exclaimed Mr. Carew. "I would have trusted Dillon wholly."

"We all trusted him," said Mr. Stewart. "But I am older than you, Richard, and I have been deceived often enough to be saddened, rather than surprised, by new instances of treachery. Miss Wolcott, your instinct of

distrust was true. You were not only wiser than your father and your young brother, but wiser than we who have employed this young man for several years. I will tell you the half of your story which you do not know. This firm had a plan to found in Tidewater such a colony as the one that Mr. Dillon has announced as his own, interesting your father in it. We were not quite ready to move in the matter, but should have been soon. Mr. Dillon has used the knowledge which, as our confidential clerk, he obtained here, for his own ends. Getting from us the indulgence of a long vacation, he has represented to us that he was spending it at Kennebunkport, whereas he went directly to Tidewater with the intention of buying up the sites which we had selected for our plan, at a lower figure than we expected to pay for them. Evidently he intended, either to forestall us with the colony bungalows, or else to force us to buy him out at a good profit. It was a likely enough bit of treachery, but it affords a new instance of the superiority of direct simplicity to tricks. You are young, an inexperienced girl, but you not only have foiled Mr. Anthony Dillon's scheme, you have also put us under a heavy obligation to you by revealing him to us in his true character. Permit me to congratulate you, and to thank you, my dear."

"I was so afraid to come!" cried Jean, beginning to

tremble, now that the ordeal was over. "But I couldn't let mother come home to no home." Jean laughed, though with a sob in her voice, over her way of stating this. "Now I'm going back to Tidewater."

"Now you are going to let the firm of Stewart, Reed & Company prove its grateful appreciation," Mr. Stewart corrected her.

Jean arose. "Oh, no, Mr. Stewart!" she cried hastily. "Stewart, Reed & Company are not under the least obligation to me. I had no idea of doing anything for them; all I wanted was to help the Wolcotts. I am grateful to you for making it certain that Mr. Dillon can't buy our house. It has all turned out far better than I dared hope it would."

"I can't say that I quite enjoy finding a man I trusted is treacherous," said Mr. Stewart, "but if he is so, it is valuable knowledge. If our project of forming a summer colony at Tidewater is carried out I think that you must be made a stockholder: we will let it rest at that for the present. Are you going back to-day, did you say?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, indeed!" cried Jean. "Helen Lumley—my best friend—is keeping house for me, but I must hurry back. There is a train at three which I'm to take."

"What a little housewife!" exclaimed Mr. Stewart,

and Jean saw that his keen eyes could smile kindly.

“What are you going to do in the meantime?”

“I thought that I should have time to look at the prophets again,” said Jean.

“At the profits?” echoed Mr. Stewart, misunderstanding. “Are you a financier?”

“Oh, I mean Sargent’s prophets, in the library,” explained Jean, and they all laughed.

“I am sorry that my house is closed and my family at Nahant,” began Mr. Stewart, but Mr. Carew interposed.

“Here is where I interfere,” he said. “I shall take Miss Wolcott to lunch, if she will be so kind as to allow me to, and perhaps I may look at the prophets again with her—may I, Miss Wolcott?”

“Thank you,” hesitated Jean.

“Shall we go directly to the library?” proposed Mr. Carew, construing her hesitation as an acceptance.

“It is not quite ten o’clock,” said Jean, suggesting the impossibility of lunching at that hour.

“I will get my hat and give the clerks some instructions; I will join you in a moment,” said Mr. Carew, hastening out of the office.

Jean shyly held out her hand to Mr. Stewart. “You have been very kind,” she said. “Thank you for listening to me. I hope that you will find a better clerk, that is if you dismiss Mr. Dillon.”

"I shall certainly dismiss Mr. Dillon," said the old gentleman with a chuckle. "My telegram recalling him for that dismissal will probably be in Tidewater before you are. Good-bye, my dear, and a pleasant journey to your beloved home. We shall undoubtedly meet again. If I do not abandon my plan we are certain to meet, and then you are to be one of the new company's stockholders. I am glad to have seen your blossom face in the office this stifling morning. Good-bye, little Miss Wolcott, child."

"Good-bye," said Jean, surprised to find herself feeling that she was taking leave of a friend.

It was somewhat oppressive to Jean at first to visit the library under the escort of a stranger not old enough to give her the confidence which Mr. Stewart's years inspired, yet too much her elder to put her at her ease, as a younger person would. But Mr. Carew knew how to make Jean forget herself, and she was soon chatting freely, telling Mr. Carew much of herself which she did not realize that she was revealing. They went to lunch at the most splendid of the city's hotels, Mr. Carew guessing that its gorgeousness would interest Jean more than the quieter dining-room which he preferred. Jean awoke to the consciousness that she was having a delightful and young-ladylike lunch, as she sat opposite this man, whose charm pervaded the occasion, no longer

embarrassing her. It was the girl's first personal glimpse of a beautiful world, widely different from the simple Tidewater life that was hers.

"I should like to live," announced Jean suddenly, as the waiter withdrew from ear-shot—she found his presence oppressive—"I should like to live in Tidewater, close to the sea, just as I do now, but I should like to have around me lovely houses, filled with clever people, and never know how any housework was done! Just live beautifully, among beauty every minute."

"The dream of Utopia and of artistic communities!" smiled Mr. Carew. "I have a friend who has tried to interest me in helping to build a settlement along those lines. Tidewater would be a good place for it. Perhaps, if my chief drops the idea of starting a Tidewater Land Improvement Company it could be carried out there. I suppose I could do what Miss Balfour wishes, even though ——"

"Miss Balfour!" cried Jean, electrified. "Do you know Miss Balfour? Why, of course! And I never thought! She said she used to know the 'and Company' of Stewart, Reed & Company quite well, and you must be he! She is at Tidewater this summer."

Mr. Carew, in his turn, seemed electrified. "Hester Balfour? Are you sure?" he cried.

"Indeed I am! Miss Hester Balfour, the writer, is

there: I couldn't mean any other. She is perfectly lovely! She came to see me so sweetly when she first went down! It was when—when some verses of mine were published. And she was coming up with me to see me through this trip, only a telegram came from her publishers, and she had to stay in Tidewater to make some changes in her novel. And you are the one she knew! Isn't she the loveliest, loveliest thing!"

"The loveliest," affirmed Mr. Carew, plainly meaning this literally. "The witch that she is to be within easy reach and not tell me! I thought that she was in the depths of the Adirondacks! We have not seen each other for a good while. Now, little Miss Wolcott——"

"More than five feet three and nearly seventeen," said Jean, her eyes sparkling as she scented a romance.

"But you were a little girl so lately!" said Mr. Carew. "However, Miss Wolcott unqualified, then—let me tell you what is to happen. By your leave, I am going with you to Tidewater this afternoon. Will you let me go down with you and see your pretty coast and also your pretty acquaintance?"

"It would be the very nicest ending to my lucky trip," said Jean. "If you won't mind my housekeeping, won't you come to the Wolcott house and let us make you comfortable?"

“Thank you, hospitable little lady! The mere invitation makes me not only comfortable, but happy. If I could be sure that I was not in the way, I should be delighted to accept it. I am afraid that I shall have to take you back to your hotel, go to my apartment for a bag and the necessary provisions for a brief trip, and meet you at the station. I am fearfully sorry to treat you so unceremoniously, but you see! It is now ten minutes to two, and our train leaves at three.” Mr. Carew held his watch open toward Jean to prove that he had to hasten.

“Oh, you mustn’t take me to my hotel; just put me on the car and I’ll go to it as straight as a die!” cried Jean. “Don’t mind treating me unceremoniously; it is the greatest fun to be taking you to Tidewater in this picnic fashion! Can I telegraph from here? I must send word to ask Step-grand to bring father home to-night. I think I’ll ask her to stay with me,” said Jean, instinctively reaching out for a chaperon, although to her eyes Mr. Carew’s thirty-odd years looked almost venerable.

“Is Mr. Wolcott away?” asked Mr. Carew. Mr. Wolcott’s absence might prevent his accepting Jean’s hospitality.

“Only at his stepmother’s, right in town,” said Jean. “I got Step-grand to invite father to visit her

till I could find out something about Mr. Dillon. Father is so enthusiastic—when he is interested at all—that I wanted him to be away till I could hunt up Mr. Dillon. Though, till the letters were found, there really seemed to be no way of doing it.”

Mr. Carew threw back his head and laughed his fill, as he pushed toward Jean a telegram blank and a pencil, which the waiter had brought him, at his request.

“Such a singular girl as you are, Miss Sherlock-Holmes Wolcott!” he said.

Jean wrote: “Come with father to spend night. Am bringing business guest.” “Will that do?” she asked, offering Mr. Carew the telegram.

Again Mr. Carew laughed. “Am I a business guest?” he inquired. “Yet I suppose that conveys our relations as well as a telegram could do it. Yes, that is all right, Miss Wolcott.”

“I don’t think you are one bit like a business acquaintance; you have been so good to me,” said Jean, following her new friend from the dining-room. “But I wanted Step-grand and father to guess that one of the firm of Stewart, Reed & Company was coming with me and I didn’t know how else to suggest it in ten words.”

“Of course; and it was skilfully done,” said Mr.

Carew, this time with entire sobriety, not even a twinkle indicating that though ten words was the limit of a sum paid for telegraphing, it was not the limit of the wires' capacity.

CHAPTER XVII

JEAN'S TRIUMPH

JEAN hurried through the brief task of repacking her suit-case at her hotel, settled her account and nervously took a car to the station, only to wait there for more than quarter of an hour for her unexpectedly acquired traveling companion. She was in a fever of nervousness when Mr. Carew calmly looked into the waiting-room, three minutes before train time.

"All ready?" he asked with a grave face, but with a twinkle as he noted Jean's purpling cheeks and dilated eyes, betraying that she was not merely ready to start on their journey, but was ready to fly off on a tangent as the hour for starting grew but seconds distant and Mr. Carew did not appear.

The train that took them down to Tidewater was a better one than had brought Jean to Boston: it made respectable time. Besides this, the breeze was from the ocean and it was not long before the effect of the proximity of the sea was felt in the refreshment of the close car.

Mr. Carew drew from Jean every least detail of her acquaintance with Miss Balfour. She told him everything that she could remember of the author, her descriptions so colored by her ardent admiration for Miss Balfour that even her lover must have been satisfied. That he was her lover was perfectly clear to Jean from the first, and, like a true girl, she reveled in her contact with a romance. By the time they had reached their destination Jean was entirely in Mr. Carew's confidence. Without a direct word being spoken, he had made known to Jean his hope to make Miss Balfour his wife, and Jean had silently echoed the wish and pledged herself to further it, if she could.

At Tidewater Steve, in response to Jean's telegram, met them with Old King Cole and the old-fashioned carryall which was the Wolcotts' comfortable, though unstylish family chariot.

"This is the boy who found the letters, my brother Stephen. Steve, this is Mr. Carew, one of the firm of Stewart, Reed & Company," Jean introduced them.

On the way to the house Jean told Steve the story of her adventures in Boston, Mr. Carew helping with the part that related to the firm's plan to transform Tidewater and Anthony Dillon's source of suggestion for his version of it, as laid before Mr. Wolcott.

Steve listened in a silence that Jean knew covered a satisfaction quite as keen as her open demonstration of joy.

"I don't much like such a smooth chap as that Dillon, myself, but he knew how to get around Rod all right," said Steve quietly. "There's the house, Mr. Carew; it's over a hundred and fifty years old and Jean and I don't want to sell it. We're afraid we may not have time to get another Wolcott house up to this age."

"It does seem as though you might be hard put to it to reproduce a century and a half in your lifetime," assented Mr. Carew, who was beginning to find the sober boy, with his high forehead and steady, grave, yet humorous eyes, as attractive as the sweet girl whose acquaintance he had made so unexpectedly that morning.

Mr. Carew exclaimed with delight, as he was ushered into the hall. It was wide, running straight through the house. Its furniture was an old mahogany Wolcott chair, standing beside an old mahogany Wolcott table, on which stood a jar of gladiolas. Fine old steel engravings hung on the walls and a beautiful colonial staircase with a mahogany hand-rail and alternate spiral and medallion rails, painted in creamy white, led in a gentle curve to the upper floor.

“My dear child, you were quite right to struggle to hold this house! I would take in washing rather than sell it!” cried Mr. Carew, enthusiastically, and from that moment Steve was his captive.

“Oh, Helen, you are still here!” cried Jean, catching Helen in an embrace out of all proportion to the length of time that they had been separated. “Indeed you are good to me! This is Mr. Carew. Miss Lumley, Mr. Carew. Where is Dorcas?”

“Up-stairs,” Dorcas called down for herself. “I made myunease sauce for supper, just one drop of oil at a time. Winnie will tell you it’s good.”

“‘My—unease’ is the right kind of sauce for uneasy Dorcas to make!” Jean whispered to Helen, stifling a laugh not to mortify Dorcas before Mr. Carew.

“She’s been an angel child since you went away; look out for trouble, Jean!” Helen whispered back.

“Perhaps,” suggested Mr. Carew, consulting his watch, “since the Head of the House has only just arrived with me, she would be glad to have me take myself off for a little while and look up Miss Balfour? Wouldn’t you be glad to be left with Miss Lumley, to talk over yesterday and gather your household into your hands again, without me *on* your hands, Miss Wolcott?”

“You wouldn’t be the least bit in the way,” said

Jean. "If you went out on our porch you would be so delighted with the cliff, the dune, the ocean, that you'd not thank any one for trying to entertain you! But I was thinking—if I could muster up courage—I should like to ask Miss Balfour to tea to-night, only I can't do what ought to be done for her, it is so late now. But authors don't care if they do have poor suppers, do they?"

"Authors care for good suppers more than for anything else, unless it is for royalties which lead to good suppers," laughed Mr. Carew. "Miss Balfour is not a worldly little creature, though. And authors do care a great deal for good times and they know when a simple supper is quite as good as a banquet. I feel sure Miss Balfour would be delighted to come here to-night—I mean I hope she would be. My misgiving is not on account of the supper. It is owing to the good ground for doubt that she would care to be here, in spite of all you would do for her, that I think I'd better go look her up before she accepts the invitation."

"I have no fear she would not like to come, except that we may not have anything fine to give her, in spite of Dorcas' 'myunease sauce'!" laughed Jean, with a glance of understanding and sympathy.

"Here is my little sister, Dorcas, Mr. Carew," she

added, as Dorcas appeared on the stairs, a picture in a white frock, with red ribbons surmounting her black hair and eyes.

“My word, you are a family of contrasts!” cried Mr. Carew. “The three I have so far seen are utterly unlike. This child looks as if she were a spark flown out of the big fireplace.”

“She’s a good deal like one!” said Jean. “Dorcas, will you show Mr. Carew the way to the Cliff House? And will you take a note for me to Miss Balfour, asking her to come back with Mr. Carew to tea?”

Jean wrote a hasty message, wondering at herself for venturing to write thus to a celebrity. Everything was happening, the world was moving rapidly in these days, and Jean had a new sense of being equal to keeping pace with it.

Dorcas returned from her errand and came into the house “like a lightning bug,” as Steve said, the simile being suggested by Dorcas’ flushed cheeks and red ribbons.

“She’ll come!” Dorcas cried. “Well, you ought to have seen her when she saw him! If she wasn’t surprised! Glad, too!” Dorcas’ eyes danced. “Goodness, girls, wouldn’t you think they’d be too old to act like that? Why, she must be more’n twenty-five! But I guess they like each other and have had a fuss.

It's int'resting; I mean to watch 'em to-night. Pooh, Jean; your authors are just like people!"

"That's the point, Dorcas," cried Helen. "That's what I've been trying to make Jean see."

Mrs. Claudia Wolcott arrived just before tea time, with Mr. Wolcott, smilingly unconscious of the vigorous protection which he had been receiving from his stepmother and daughter.

"I've brought you biscuits; they are still warm, Jean," said Mrs. Wolcott, as she entered. "I had them made just as soon as I got your telegram, and also some croquettes. All you have to do is to set the biscuits in the oven and the croquettes over the fire. I thought you might need something extra. Is everything all right?"

"Everything is all right, Step-grand, because I've found out that Anthony Dillon is all wrong. He's been a scamp, toward us, but still more toward his employers—this is one of them come down with me. Thank you ever so much for adding to the supper! Miss Balfour is coming to tea," said Jean.

Miss Balfour arrived in due season, under Mr. Carew's escort. She took Jean's face in her hands and kissed again and again the soft cheeks, flushed with Jean's rapid efforts to get Mr. Carew's room in order and to help Winnie with the supper.

"You funny little heroine!" Miss Balfour said. "Mr. Carew has been telling me of all that happened in Boston and how surprised he and Mr. Stewart were, first by your coming and next by your revelations. He said you 'came down like a lamb on the wolves!'"

"He has been so nice to me!" said Jean, at once gratefully and artfully.

"Yes. To me, too," said Miss Balfour demurely, and she kissed Jean again, hard, when Jean laughed. "I do so long to hear the story!" she added.

"Didn't Mr. Carew tell you all of it?" asked Jean.

"Not all of it, Jeannie. He had to tell me something about himself. Mr. Carew and I parted on bad terms; we haven't met in a long time. I was wrong, but I was trying to hold out, not confessing it. When I saw him coming up the Cliff House steps I confessed it without thinking—by being glad. So I have not heard everything about your Boston adventures," said Miss Balfour rapidly, for Jean's ear alone.

"Not till after supper," Mrs. Claudia Wolcott said, when they were all seated at the table and the others begged Jean to tell them about her trip. "No one can be a hostess and a historian at the same time. Let Jean make us all comfortable and after tea we will gather on the porch to listen to her Odyssey."

"I had no idea that Jean was going to Boston," said

Mr. Wolcott. "I should have been glad to have sent for some thin silk; I need it in an aeronautical experiment. Did you go to the dentist, daughter?"

"No, father dear; I went to—to a sort of Court of Appeals," said Jean.

Everybody was beamingly happy, except Rodney. Rod looked uneasy and glum throughout the little feast at which all but him got into riotously high spirits as it progressed. The boy suspected that, in some way, Jean's visit boded ill to his admired friend and he looked askance at the puzzling stranger who had accompanied Jean home, and who must have something to do with the case.

After supper they gathered on the porch and Jean—with Mr. Carew once more to confirm and develop the blacker part of the story, Dillon's baseness toward his generous friends—told her father and his stepmother, Miss Balfour and Helen, all profoundly interested, and Rodney, writhing as he heard, all that she knew of Anthony Dillon's plot to wrong the Wolcotts and the firm of Stewart, Reed & Company.

"I can't understand such perfidy; I can't understand it!" protested Mr. Wolcott, having heard Jean through with dazed amazement. "Such a charming young man! And to offer us less than he knew that we were to be offered by his firm, and to try to undermine that firm,

using the confidence, the trust they reposed in him against themselves! I can't understand that it is true!"

"It isn't true!" burst out Rod. "I don't believe one word of it!" His face was crimson from a variety of emotions; he looked as though, if he had been a girl, he would have burst into tears.

"Gently, gently, Rodney!" warned his father. "We are both profoundly shocked, but not only has Jean seen Mr. Dillon's employers, but the youngest member of the firm is here now. You are forgetting in your first keen grief and horror over it that there is, unfortunately, no room to doubt Mr. Dillon's treachery. I am sure Mr. Carew and your sister will not be offended that it is your first instinct to blame any one rather than he who is not here to speak for himself."

"Well, here's another illustration of an old saying!" murmured Mrs. Claudia.

For, as Mr. Wolcott spoke, Anthony Dillon came smiling around the flagged walk that ran from the edge of the cliff up to the porch where the Wolcotts and their guests were seated. He paused as he saw the large group gathered there, and his heart leaped with pleasure as he recognized among them Mr. Wolcott. His vacation was to end in a few days; all his efforts to meet Mr. Wolcott, or to see him alone at his stepmother's

during the past week had failed. The return of Mr. Wolcott to his home was essential to the success of Anthony Dillon's plans, and he was delighted to see that Mr. Wolcott had come.

"I'm glad you're back, sir," he cried, running up the steps with his hand outstretched to Mr. Wolcott.

Mr. Wolcott, gentle and ineffective in all practical things, had a standard of honor that made him stern toward anything like dishonesty. He put his hand behind his back and said: "One moment, Mr. Dillon." At the same time he slightly indicated Mr. Carew with a motion of his right hand.

Anthony Dillon turned in that direction. His outstretched hand fell limp at his side, his jaw fell also. "Mr. Carew!" he gasped.

"Mr. Carew, Dillon," said that gentleman quietly. "Come to Tidewater in high time."

No one spoke nor moved except Mrs. Claudia Wolcott, who leaned forward slightly, enjoying the drama and Mr. Dillon's discomfiture.

"So that is why Miss Jean hurried off to Boston!" said Anthony Dillon slowly. "Before Steve gave me back the bundle of letters that he found, you read them!"

Jean crimsoned indignantly. "We read the name of the firm from which they came, Mr. Dillon. It was on

the envelope, plain, for all the world to read. We do not act dishonorably, even if we are trying to hunt down dishonor. I had been anxious to find some one who knew you to be what both Steve and I felt sure you were all along. So I went to Boston, saw Stewart, Reed & Company, and Mr. Carew is here," said Jean, speaking with a slow dignity, trying to hold down her wrath.

"There's nothing to be gained by being impertinent to Miss Wolcott, Dillon," added Mr. Carew, and there was a hint of steel in his kindly voice.

"I suppose I may as well retire gracefully," said Anthony Dillon, with a mocking bow to Jean. "I imagine the game is up."

"Both here and in Stewart, Reed & Company's office your game is certainly up, Dillon," said Mr. Carew gravely. "The senior partner would have telegraphed you to return for your dismissal this afternoon, but that, when I decided to come up here, I telephoned him to let me get here before you heard that you were found out. I will not say anything about the firm's disappointment, Anthony. We trusted you and liked you; if you had served us as we believed you would, it would have been our pleasure to have furthered your fortunes materially. We're sorry enough, be sure. Aside from the question of right and wrong, it is utterly stupid to

turn away from straight and open ways into crooked ones ; you have made a mess of your life, Anthony, as well as wronged those who believed in you and gave you their confidence. Pull up and do the straight thing in future."

Anthony Dillon turned away, pale, not acknowledging Mr. Carew's valedictory further than with a bow, and, with something of his old easy lightness of manner, he said : "I wish you all a very good-evening," and walked jauntily away.

Rod broke from his father's restraining hand with a cry.

"I've got to go ! There's a mistake !" he screamed. "Wait for me, Tony ; I'm going with you !"

"Oh, Rod, Rod, come back !" cried Jean in distress. "Don't let Rod follow him. He will try to make him believe that black is white, and nobody knows what harm he may do to a boy like Rod, who pities him."

"Give the boy a little time, Miss Jean," said Mr. Carew wisely. "He has all a boy's admiration for a young man in his affection for Dillon, and Anthony has a charm for more than Rod. Rod's inheritance and training will assert itself : don't fear. This is the first keen shock of finding Dillon unworthy and all of us against him. That boy is wretchedly unhappy to-

night: he's disappointed and shocked, though he won't admit it, and he has the instinct to defend the under dog that you want every boy to have. Rod will drop Dillon if you let him alone. No fear of Dillon's hanging around Tidewater, either."

"It is rather like a story, or a play," said Miss Balfour thoughtfully. "How strong this story-making instinct is! One side of my brain is always seeing the story in events, while the other responds to the human side. It is sad to see that young man going away disgraced. I wonder whether he will take Mr. Carew's advice and use his wits to good purposes in future? I hope so."

"I doubt it," said Mrs. Claudia Wolcott crisply. "He has the sort of mind and character that prefers tricks. I don't believe the sort of treachery he showed his employers in return for kindness ever is made straight—ever wants to be straight. Curious, that a man can be so stupid and yet cunning! If Dillon had spent half the time inventing new ways to do right that he spent inventing tricks, he'd have made his mark in the world. That side of roguery always strikes one's common sense—it's so utterly stupid and wasteful!"

"That's what I think, Step-grand," said Steve emphatically. "It's that way in school. There's nothing in being a crook, playing games, or cheating in class,

or any old way. Of course no decent chap wants to be crooked, but if he did there's nothing in it."

"I do hope Rod won't be influenced—I shall be glad when mother comes home to Rod," said Jean anxiously.

"We won't talk business, not even morals, any longer to-night," said Miss Balfour rising. "Jean is tired and hasn't seen her father in several days. But Mr. Carew and I have often discussed the nicest scheme! We shall ask to talk it over with you before long."

"With pleasure," said Mr. Wolcott. Jean was watching Mr. Carew and she saw the supreme satisfaction in his face when he heard the "we" by which Miss Balfour associated him with herself.

"Now there's a story—a love story, too!—that I don't believe Miss Balfour thinks of for a magazine!" thought Jean, watching her new friends as they walked along the cliff in an atmosphere of bliss apparent even to Jean and Helen's inexperience.

CHAPTER XVIII

JEAN FACES SORROW

THE following morning Jean lingered in the dining-room, waiting for Rodney. The others had breakfasted and dispersed. Mrs. Claudia Wolcott had gone home and so had Helen. Mr. Carew had departed in search of Miss Balfour, who had promised to show him some of the beauties of that part of the Massachusetts coast. Rodney did not come down-stairs ; Jean knew that it was because he wished to avoid his family's kindness, as well as the duty of being polite to their guests. But she lingered, hoping to make him happier while ministering to his comfort. If Rod were to brood over Jean's victory and drift into permanent resentment, the sale of the house would have been the lesser misfortune. Wounded vanity is harder to heal than wounded love : Rod had been hurt in both ways, for he had grown admiringly fond of Anthony Dillon. He was at that critical age when a boy feels at once important and touchy at other people's lack of deference toward him. Jean knew that Rod had always been the one of her mother's children that caused her most

uneasiness: he was inclined to separate himself from the others and his character lacked that stability which was the sure inheritance of all the Wolcotts. Even Dorcas, though she was indeed the "witch-child" that they called her, had a certain uprightness in her make-up that would be perfectly reliable in all great matters.

Jean anxiously tried to think of ways to prove to Rodney that she was his loving, devoted sister and to break up his bitterness toward her. At last Rod came slowly down to his late breakfast, sullen, gloomy, with black looks for Jean.

"I heard you stirring, Rod, and I made you fresh coffee. We had chops, but they are hard: I have poached you two eggs on toast, in case you can't eat the chops," she said.

"Don't fuss," said Rod ungraciously. "I don't want anything that I can't get for myself. You needn't try to act so nice to me; you said you'd do all you could to head off that sale and I know you're chuckling over your victory. It's worse to pretend to be sorry."

"How can you be so unfair, Rod? When did you ever know me to pretend anything?" cried Jean, indignant in spite of her resolutions. Then she recalled her duty. "I'm just as sorry as I can be for your disappointment in Mr. Dillon; it's hard. Of course I was

sorry all along that you didn't see him as he was, because I felt sure about him, and I didn't want you disappointed—though I'd rather you were than for you not to know him as he is. I'd do anything to help you out, Rod dear. Please don't be so unfair to me. I'm not to blame for Mr. Dillon's treachery. Can't you be glad, Rod, even though it is hard on you, that we found him out in time to save us all from trusting him too far ? ”

“ Oh, cut it out ! ” said Rod. “ What's the use of talking ? Tony's gone, anyhow. He's lucky to be out of this one horse little village. ”

Jean went away without another word. She saw that Rodney was smarting, furious that his wisdom had been proved vain, as well as his friendship empty of its object, and that there was nothing to be done until he should have recovered sufficiently to see things in their true light. It was hard to be patient ; Rod ought to be disgusted with Dillon's dishonesty and swing back to the upright girl that loved him. Above all the gibe at Tidewater frightened Jean. That was the side of Rod that always frightened her and that she longed to wipe out. Jean went out on the porch and looked out to sea with clouded, inward gazing eyes. Her mother, oh, her mother ! Would she never come home ! Rod needed her sweetness, her wisdom, her

patience, her motherhood and at his age delays were dangerous when traits of character needed amending.

Miss Balfour and Mr. Carew came along the cliff.

“We did not explore the coast far,” said Mr. Carew. “I’m going to take the next train to Boston and I shall return in a few days. I want to talk over with Mr. Stewart his plan for a summer colony here; if he is willing to merge it into another that I—that Miss Balfour and I like a good deal, then I shall have to return to talk about it to your father, without whom it is impossible. So I am going to take leave of my kind little hostess and thank her for all that she has done for me—and been the means of my obtaining.”

Mr. Carew glanced at Miss Balfour with such significance that Jean allowed herself to return the glance with a smile that accepted its meaning.

“I’m glad,” she said.

“How does Mr. Carew go to the station?” interposed Miss Balfour.

“By Old King Cole and the carryall, under the protection of Miss Balfour and Jean, the Wolcotts’ French coachman,” laughed Jean. “And I suppose I ought to tell you that there isn’t much time to lose, although it sounds inhospitable.”

“It is part of true hospitality to speed the parting guest. I’ll run up to my room and be down again in

a few moments ; I'll pack my bag the way they make dumplings—drop things in the middle and squeeze it together ! ” cried Mr. Carew darting off boyishly.

Jean got her guest to the station just in time to make the train ; he bade both girls a hasty good-bye and fled across the station platform to leap aboard. Mr. Wolcott appeared as the train pulled out, looking surprised and a little hurt that it had gone before he had shaken Mr. Carew's hand. He took the vacant seat in the carryall and Jean drove him home. He seemed to her more than ever removed from the life around him. The discovery that Anthony Dillon was everything that he disapproved had sent him adrift for a time. It was always difficult to get Mr. Wolcott to grasp facts, so when he had accepted anything for a fact and it proved to be so painfully untrue as Anthony Dillon's worth had proved, it left the dear man in a maze of confusion.

The day was sultry, growing more so. There was a deadly stillness in the air, a sullen menace of nature. Not a twig stirred. King Cole's slowness was justified as he droopingly poked along homeward.

Miss Balfour stayed to lunch with Jean on her first asking and after it was over Miss Balfour coaxed Jean down on the beach. Jean went with her gladly ; they both were restless in the nerve-irritating condition of

the atmosphere. The elder and younger girl went down the beach steps which were the shortest cut to the sands in front of the Wolcott house and went a little distance up the beach where Miss Balfour curled down under the half shadow of a long-stranded dory and Jean dropped beside her in the sand. There was a promise of confidence in Miss Balfour's manner and Jean felt sure that she knew the matter of it in advance. Not a breath stirred. The ocean lay motionless under a fierce sun that seemed veiled, in spite of its merciless heat and the glare of the sky, which looked molten, cloudless, yet not clear. In the west great white cloud heads curled in thick masses, with blue darkness in their bases, near the horizon.

"Isn't it awful?" sighed Miss Balfour. "This foreboding, heavy air makes me ill."

"Do you feel it, too?" cried Jean. "I always have a headache when showers are coming, and I feel as nervously restless as a cat."

"We must watch the sky: there'll be a shower and I have fifteen minutes' walk to shelter," said Miss Balfour.

"Fifteen minutes to your hotel, but not more than five minutes to shelter," corrected Jean. "I wish you would stay with me—unless you would rather not?—if the shower does come."

“Oh, it may pass us by,” said Miss Balfour. “The sky is not like any that I have seen before. Of course I should like to be with you instead of at the hotel, alone. There is something to tell you, little new-friend. I think I ought to tell you first of any one, because you were the *dea ex machina* of it—at the last, at any rate.”

“I could not help guessing after that hint, though I knew before,” cried Jean. “He is so nice that I don’t wonder.”

“And you knew! I don’t wonder either, Jean; he is nicer than you know!” cried Miss Balfour. “We have been friends for six years, but I was foolish enough to resist anything beyond friendship. I thought that my work, my career, was more to me than love! But I was young; that is my excuse.”

“Don’t you still think that your work is more—— No, I suppose not more than love. The great poets all say that love, real love, is first of all things. But when a person has a great talent, like yours, oughtn’t they sacrifice everything to it? I beg your pardon; of course you don’t think so, if you have promised to marry Mr. Carew,” said Jean, frightened by her own temerity.

“Certainly I do not think so,” said Miss Balfour decidedly. “Don’t you let that idea spoil your life, Jean,

as it might have spoiled mine, if Alan Carew had not been a persistent lover! Why, my dear child, we successful, but small fry, have not a great enough message for the world to warrant our failure to play our part in it! I have some talent, yes! So have you, as I believe. I have succeeded to a desirable degree and probably you could succeed if you chose, but do you suppose this small measure of success will satisfy the starved woman in us, the woman that we shall both be one day, I sooner than you, but both of us too soon? The woman whose youth has gone with nothing to show for it but printed pages and a teacup notoriety?"

"It always seemed to me beautiful to live for art," said Jean timidly.

"Dear me! That is a very youthful speech—pardon me, dear!" laughed Miss Balfour. "Tell me, haven't you been happier, on the whole and in spite of the weariness and worries, during these weeks that you have taken charge of your family than ever before?"

Jean considered. "I really believe that I have been," she said slowly. "It is nice to be of some use."

"All women, all true women, delight in serving those whom they love," said Miss Balfour. "There are a few women who are not home-makers by nature, but, thank goodness, only a few and not your sort. I have known a few sweet, true, womanly women who seem

to keep a perpetual girlhood, who go through life engrossed in their work, free of heart, yet kindly and often mothering lots of things and people; more than they would have mothered if they had cared to marry, as they never did seem to think of doing. But that is a rare type. They have their own place and beautifully fulfil their vocation. You are a lady, Jean—for your comfort! A ‘giver of bread,’ you know what that means! Roger Cathcart is a dear boy, Jean! You are on the verge of seventeen. I am not advising settling great questions yet, but—Roger is a dear boy! When the time comes, don’t be blind to the fact.”

“Yes, I know he is,” said Jean, blushing furiously, but not dodging the challenge. “But Roger is—just Roger! I dream of doing such beautiful, big things, and Roger hates my sort of big things.”

“No, he doesn’t!” cried Miss Balfour, and Jean was surprised to discover that she knew so much about Roger. “He is exceedingly proud of your talent, only he feared it would spoil the more important side of you. When you had grown all around, if he had a right to interfere with you, Roger Cathcart would never try to prevent your making a name for yourself. Jean, how dark it is getting! The shower is coming!” Miss Balfour broke off her exordium in a sudden perception that darkness of a strange, greenish sort was

dropping upon them. As she spoke the menacing yellow-green sky was riven with an immense bolt of lightning.

“It has come!” Jean cried, springing to her feet, as a gust of wind whirled down the beach, eddying the sand around them and lifting the foam on the crest of the great waves into which the ocean had aroused to threatening action. “We must run for the house this instant!”

“Why, there’s a boat, coming out from the point! Look, it’s half-way out to the light,” exclaimed Miss Balfour hastily gaining her feet to follow Jean.

“A boat with such a shower coming! I thought there was no one in Tidewater as foolish as that!” cried Jean. Then her face blanched; she clutched Hester Balfour’s arm. “It’s Dorcas, our little Dorcas,” she whispered hoarsely. “She has taken a boat at the point and gone out! Thunder-storms always make her wild! Oh, tell me what to do! Tell me! She will be lost. Oh, mother, mother! How shall I ever meet my mother!”

“Jean, dear, poor little Jean!” Miss Balfour heard herself saying, as if it were a voice far away. “Where is the nearest man to go after her?”

“Down in the town, among the wharves we might find an old sailor willing to risk it. But before we

got there —— Oh, look, look !” Jean hid her eyes, not daring to look, as she cried out.

From a sky that had rapidly grown black from horizon to horizon, yet had retained its ghastly yellow-greenish color, there came flashes of lightning so lurid that the whole earth and sea seemed but the mouth of an infinite pit. The ocean rose to madness under the furious wind, and the roar of great waves mingled with the crash of thunder directly overhead. The girls could no longer see Dorcas in her little boat ; they dared not think whether or not she still was there.

As Hester Balfour strained her eyes over the waters, lighted by the constant flashes, and Jean clung to her with hidden face, trembling and moaning her wordless prayer, there glided out from shore another rowboat, rising and falling like a dead leaf on the towering waves. It was rowed, as far as rowing was possible, by one man. A flash of lightning that played around him lit up his white shirt and revealed the face above it.

“Jean, Jean, oh, Jean, Roger has gone after her !” cried Miss Balfour through the wind.

“Roger ! Oh, no, he hasn’t ! Not Roger ! He hasn’t gone, too ! Oh, Roger, Roger !” wailed Jean, seeing as she cried out that it was indeed Roger.

Miss Balfour put her arms around Jean without a

word, but Jean slipped through them to her knees upon the sand. She clasped her hands and knelt there in the driving rain, her face set and deathly white in the illumined darkness, her eyes straining out to sea to follow the two boats freighted with love.

A figure came down the beach with hurrying step, forgetful of the tempest, possessed with but one thought, a thought that drove Roger's mother to Jean, for whose little sister her boy was risking his life, drove her to Jean whom that boy loved. She almost stumbled over the two girls, Jean kneeling, Hester beside her, holding her.

"Oh, Jeannie, then you know!" cried Mrs. Cathcart.

Jean sprang to her feet and cried out wildly: "He has gone to save Dorcas, Mrs. Cathcart. God won't let him be lost. I thought for a moment that he would never come back to us, but now I know he will. Dear Roger's mother, don't be afraid!"

The girl's eyes were dilated, her breath came short, her face took on a look of exultation. As the lightning threw it into white relief against the storm Hester Balfour felt her courage leap up; it was as if Jean were inspired to prophesy, as if she were a creature of another world, half a spirit.

Roger's mother put her arms around Jean and drew

her close, half leaning upon her, half sustaining her. Jean's cold hands tenderly smoothed the older woman's wet hair from her forehead. Clinging to each other, Roger's mother and Jean strained their eyes to sea for a glimpse of the boat that bore the brave boy they both loved, and for the other boat that had held little madcap Dorcas, such a feeble creature to contest the power of the storm.

The storm began to slacken, the sky showed faint lights, but the wind was unabated and the waves rolled to shore, towering, crested and angry. Roger's mother and Jean waited to know their fate.

The sun came out over a sea white with iridescent foam that flashed its brightness up into the whirling wind. It shone over a refreshed earth, redolent of faint, moist odors, and over birds singing their ecstasy that the storm had passed, while, like the sustaining drums and viols and 'cellos of an orchestra, the distant thunder upheld the bird chorus as the shower went down the southeastern sky.

Tidewater had seen Dorcas starting out alone in the face of the coming peril, though no one had seen her in time to stop her going, nor until she had passed well out of reach of land. It had also seen Roger go out to try to save her. As soon as the storm was over small boats started out under reefed sails to search for



NO ONE CAME NEAR THE THREE WOMEN

the child and her rescuer, and the people gathered in knots upon the beach to watch for the return of those who had launched out after the two in peril. From one to another they whispered that there was slender chance of Roger's returning with Dorcas—if he returned at all.

No one came near the three women straining their eyes out to sea a short distance above the Wolcott cliff. Mrs. Cathcart and Jean, Hester Balfour beside them, had not moved. They were not conscious of the sunshine, nor that their neighbors had gathered to pity or congratulate them, as it might be. They knew only that the ocean was now studded with catboats and small sloops and schooners, put out for rescue, but their tense minds were set beyond the boats on that vast expanse of water at which so many coast women have learned to look with the horror of an undying memory. Hester Balfour stood close to them, feeling miles away and aloof in her exclusion from their rending agony, and in the helplessness of her aching pity. This, then, was the way that sorrow fell in the midst of bright plans and youthful security! This, then, was life which such as she dared to try to portray! How dared she write stories, since words were so inadequate to tell a story like this!

Mr. Wolcott, immersed in his aerial rudders, up in

the tower room, was one of the few people in Tidewater ignorant in that hour of his child's danger. Rod and Steve had gone out in their little boat, the *Nixie*, among the other boats. Jean had a brief glimpse of Rodney's wild eyes and Steve's desperate ones as the boys passed her to launch their dory and row out to the *Nixie's* moorings. She had wondered at herself for dully thinking that, at least, the death of Dorcas would sober Rodney and melt him into one with his stricken family.

CHAPTER XIX

JEAN'S REWARD

THE lighthouse boat had started out from the little cove that had been sea-made between the rocks of the reef. It had tacked up against the northwest wind slowly; the Tidewater boats, running down on long tacks, almost free of the wind, met it far out toward the light. The little *Nixie*, one of the fastest of the small crafts, and risking more sail than her betters carried in the still heavy wind, outstripped most of the other boats and soon overhauled the lighthouse craft. Those on shore could not hear Rod and Steve's shout, but it was caught up by those nearest to them and echoed faintly to the shore. Jean's long-visioned eyes, accustomed to great seaward distances, saw the boys' black figures against the *Nixie's* sail as they stood on her small deck with uplifted arms. Then she saw the *Nixie's* sail, with the one reef under which the boys had ventured out rashly shaken out, peak up proudly against the mast, the peak lowered, raised again, lowered and raised three times.

Jean sprang to her feet with a low cry of joy. "They have found them!" she cried.

“Jean! But maybe not, not both of them! I don’t dare be glad!” gasped Mrs. Cathcart.

“Our boys are signaling to me that Dorcas is there—and I know Roger is safe!” said Jean. “Helen, when did you come? They have found them!”

“I have been here some time, Jean, dearest,” said Helen tremulously. “Yes, the boys are signaling. I believe they mean that Dorcas has been picked up by the lighthouse tender.”

“Dorcas and Roger,” insisted Jean. “The joy of life has new keenness because of the sorrow that missed us.”

Hester Balfour looked at Jean as the girl caught Roger’s mother to her in an impassioned embrace. “There is no more fear that Jean will not love Roger perfectly; when she is old enough to marry, she will marry him,” thought the older girl. “If only she is right and it is not the child alone who is saved! How instinctively the girl expresses her joy in psalmody! Whatever befalls her, sweet, strong-hearted Jean is to be a poet.”

It was hard to wait for the boats to beat up near enough to shore for the anxious hearts hanging on them to learn what news they brought. The head wind was cruel. But, as if it relented, the wind veered as the shower split, down toward the south, and part of it

passed northward again. With the change an easterly breeze sprang up, mercifully speeding the homing boats straight toward Tidewater, free of the wind. The lighthouse boat was ugly, painted blue above her water line, her yellow keel showing only when she leaned far over, but she had speed in her awkward lines and she and the *Nixie* came up together, in advance of their comrade craft.

First of all the watchers Jean's gray eyes made out that for which they were straining. Roger stood far up in the bow of the boat, his arm encircling her mast as she dipped and rose through the breakers. Square-shouldered and strong of outline, with his massive head in relief against the *Beacon's* sail, he stood, showing himself to the eyes that he knew hungered for the sight. How splendid he was! How could any of them have imagined that the sea had devoured his young manhood? Jean dwelt on the lithe figure of her old schoolmate with hungry eyes, triumphing in her certainty that he would come back, but unspeakably grateful that now it was certainty that he *had* come back.

"See, Mother Cathcart!" cried Jean. Hester Balfour and Helen looked at each other through tears. To the older girl, keeping the love of Alan Carew in her heart, and to the younger one to whom love had not

come, the note in Jean's voice was thrilling with profound meanings.

A moment later the waiters on the beach saw Dorcas held up in the arms of the lighthouse keeper's assistant. And then they heard, borne in upon the east wind blowing toward them, a hymn sung by the men in all the boats as they came home. They were the descendants of the Puritans and they sang, in their triumphal procession behind the rescuers, the grandly solemn Old Hundredth :

“ Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

The watchers on the beach took up the hymn and it rolled out again to sea :

“ Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

Thus after the storm, with thanksgiving, they brought Roger and Dorcas back to those that loved them.

The *Beacon* came up and made the *Nixie's* moorings in order to let Roger come ashore in the Wolcott boys' dory at that part of the beach where Roger's mother and Dorcas' sister were waiting for them.

Rod called from the *Nixie* to Roger to take their skiff, that he and Steve would wait till some one could bring it out again for them to land. Accordingly Roger let Dorcas down into it, jumped in after her himself and pulled with long, hard strokes for the shore and the waiting woman and girl.

It was his mother first, not Jean, whom Roger saw ; he must be credited with that. While he held his mother fast and soothed her, as she clung to him, and while repentant, quivering Dorcas hid her tear-stained and swollen face in Jean's shoulder, Roger's eyes sought Jean. And Hester Balfour, seeing the look with which Jean's eyes answered his, knew that one day her hope for Jean would be fulfilled.

"You ought to have known I'd come back to Tidewater ; always liked the place," said Roger, trying, after the fashion of a true American boy, to cover profound emotion with a light word. But it was not successful trifling ; his voice trembled, and Jean could not answer as Roger took both her hands and held them close, quite unconscious that he did so.

They all turned and moved slowly toward the steps that led up to the cliff, Dorcas holding fast to Jean's hand, Jean and Mrs. Cathcart each clasping one of Roger's arms.

"Dorcas upset," Roger was saying. "I picked her

up as she clung to the overturned boat. But in getting her into my boat I lost my oars : the waves were running high and they were swept off as the boat tipped to one side when I hauled Dorcas into her. We drifted out toward the light. The lighthouse keeper saw us by the flashes of lightning and put out after us. I suppose I did save Dorcas, but that plucky fellow may have saved us both. No one can say what would have happened if he hadn't come after us ; the chance of being swept off by those big waves was a little greater than I care to think about. However, it's all over now, motherkins and my little chum. And I believe I've pulled something worth having out of that storm ! I believe Jean is glad I didn't move into Mermaidville from Tidewater ! ”

Jean could not answer. Her joy was unutterable, but it still scarcely bridged the space between it and a sorrow as great.

Mrs. Claudia Wolcott drove over that evening. She found the family gathered together within doors, as close as they could gather. Mr. Wolcott, aroused out of his dreams by the story of his narrow escape from the loss of his little girl, held Dorcas on his knee, while Steve fed her with chocolate creams, in which he had invested the money that he had saved for new rowlocks. Dorcas was a witch-child and a trial, but Steve felt that

life would have been hard to face if she had been lying that night out yonder beneath the waves.

Rodney's chair was close to his father's: he sat with his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, silent, pale, tremulous about the lips. Rodney looked exhausted. The hard experience of finding his golden friendship dross and the tragedy which had been so nearly enacted that afternoon had added years, for the time at least, to the handsome face of the careless boy of fifteen.

Jean looked suddenly grown up also, but far from sadly so. She was radiant of eyes, pale, but smiling; she looked as though a light had been kindled within her. She met her step-grandmother with a quiet kiss to which, for once, that eccentric lady did not object.

"I came over," observed Mrs. Claudia, "because there is a moon and I don't mind driving at night when there is one, and because I wanted to see you all, to make sure I actually could still see you all! There isn't any use in saying anything about such an afternoon as you spent, Jean, but I felt as though I'd sleep better for seeing you. Dorcas, I suppose there is still less use in asking you what did possess you?"

Dorcas shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "I wanted to get right out into the middle of the wind and the lightning and all the storm. There isn't

a bit of wildness in me now, Step-grand ; I'm all over being mischievous."

"While you're so frightened and tired !" commented Mrs. Claudia. "You won't change your spots, you most spotted of little leopard cubs ! But I do certainly think you might spare your family such agony as this prank has cost."

"I shall," said Dorcas, and Jean, for one, believed her.

"When is your birthday, Jean ? I never am certain of even family dates. The fourteenth of September ?" inquired Mrs. Claudia, with what seemed like an irrelevant mental leap.

"Yes, Step-grand : I shall be eighteen years old in less than three weeks !" said Jean.

"It won't matter what name you give your years for ten years to come," remarked Mrs. Wolcott. "At your age and mine, Jean, we can afford, for different reasons, to laugh at time. I thought that you would have a desirable present on your birthday, but it came ahead of time. I brought it here to-night ; it's out in the carriage, in fact. Shall I bring it in ?"

"How queer you look, Step-grand !" cried sharp-eyed Dorcas.

"Excited by the splendor of Jean's gift," declared Mrs. Claudia with, actually, a nervous laugh. If the

elder Mrs. Wolcott developed nerves then no one's balance could be depended upon.

"Shall I help you bring it in, Step-grand?" asked Rod, arousing himself to his duty.

"No, thanks; I can easily get it in. I'll fetch it," said Mrs. Claudia, fairly rushing from the room.

She was not gone long; they heard her returning slowly, and—some one was following her!

Mrs. Claudia came into the room, her hands empty as when she had left it, but she halted in the doorway.

"Jean will have to share her birthday gift with you all," she said, and stepped aside.

For the space of an intaken breath there was silence, then the room rang with the cry of all the Wolcotts together: "Mother, mother, mother!" and Mrs. Wolcott's children rushed tumultuously to where their mother stood in the doorway! Their mother, tears of joy in her eyes, a soft flush on her cheeks, smiling, *well!*

"Mary!" said Mr. Wolcott, softly, sitting still and staring with dim eyes at the apparition. The new joy had benumbed him; it was too much, following after the emotion with which he had learned of the sorrow that day escaped.

Jean, Rod and Steve clung around their mother, Dorcas knelt clasping her knees and incoherently sob-

bing out something, as she wildly kissed the small black bag her mother carried. The poor child could not force her way into the tangle of her elders and greater.

Mrs. Wolcott helped her, stooping and drawing Dorcas up to her, where she snuggled her head into her mother's neck and held her tight, once more "the Wolcott baby" and not the madcap Dorcas.

"Oh, mother, mother! And we had no idea!" sighed Jean, falling back to look at the dear face. It was altered, refreshed, the tired look was gone, the peacefully smiling eyes were clear, with the look of health in them, no longer shadowed by weary blue-veined lids.

"I did not intend you to have an idea, Jean daughter," said Mrs. Wolcott. She brushed aside her children and went to meet her husband as he arose to take his share of the rejoicing. "Bentley, dear Bentley," she said. "It is good, good to be at home!"

"Mary, dear, Jean has been all that a child could be—but no child can be Mary!" returned Mr. Wolcott folding his wife in his arms with a grave tenderness that revealed the profoundest joy. "I have missed you. I didn't know how much till I saw you standing there."

"Are you well, mother? Honest?" asked Steve.

"Quite well, sonny-boy. I am pronounced fit for active service," laughed Mrs. Wolcott. Her eyes sought Jean's. "Daughter mine, you have saved your mother!"

"She's worth saving! I mean to keep right on saving her," whispered Jean. They were all impeding Mrs. Wolcott's progress to the couch, hanging on her, adoring her, but she reached it at last and sat in the middle, with her family almost festooned around her—there was no other place possible for her to sit except on that old couch which would hold them all.

Jean slipped to the floor and put her arms on her mother's knees, the better to see the dear face she had hungered for. Mrs. Wolcott was beautiful, not so much with the beauty of her regular, delicate features, but with the beauty of purity, holiness, devotion, of wisdom and experience of the deepest things in life, which crowned her broad low brow and shone with a steady illumination from her gray eyes, eyes like Jean's, but older eyes.

"Mother, you are so dear I can't bear it!" cried Jean, dropping her face on the hand she had captured. She did not define her meaning, but Jean felt the true motherhood looking out from her mother's face, felt it sacred, like the divine revelation of a madonna enshrined.

“Tell how you came to-night,” said Dorcas.

“I wrote mother, asking her to meet me and keep the secret from the old house folk,” said Mrs. Wolcott gleefully. “I had expected to be set free in time to get here on Jean’s birthday, but I was dismissed sooner, for good conduct ! I have been a satisfactory patient at Mount Horsford ; they like people who get well and they reward them by sending them away. Oh, how shall I make you understand how glad I am to be at home ! ”

“ Well, I guess ! ” said Rod. “ We could give you a point or two on being glad, our own selves.”

Then they all fell to talking at once, and after a while Mrs. Wolcott, the elder, withdrew. “I don’t see that I’m needed in the chorus,” she said. “I’m going home to wait till the blackbirds come next spring ; then I’ll hear chatter just like this, but I can understand their talk ! ”

It was after ten when the Wolcotts went up-stairs, but not then to sleep. Mrs. Wolcott put Dorcas to bed. “You’re to be my baby again to-night, Dorcas chicken,” she declared.

No one had told her of the horrible danger of that afternoon, but Dorcas could not sleep till she had confessed.

“It was awful in me, mamma,” she ended. “But

you know I get such streaks. I guess it nearly killed Jean. I kind of think I'll not be so crazy any more."

Mrs. Wolcott held the little girl fast, thanking heaven for the warmth of her clinging arms. Suppose she had come back that night to a stricken household with no little Dorcas in it! The mother was quite white and speechless as she kissed the child and tucked her into her bed.

As she left the room Rodney waylaid her. "Come in here a minute, mother," he said, and Mrs. Wolcott went into Rod's room, wondering what his ashamed face meant.

"Jean tell you about Dillon and selling this house?" Rod asked.

"Selling this —— Oh, Rodney, no!" Mrs. Wolcott sat down precipitately on the edge of the bed, beginning to wonder if the happiness they had shared down-stairs was founded on dangers escaped, or threatened by trouble to come. "Who is Dillon?"

Rod set down a mark to Jean's credit in his mind, discovering that she had not betrayed him to his mother. Then he told her the story, told it briefly, in boyish terms, but Mrs. Wolcott heard what he did not say and understood.

"I've been a chump, and I've been mean enough to

Jean, but —— Well, I liked Tony Dillon pretty well and I thought he was all right.”

“What a splendid little woman Jean has proved herself!” cried Mrs. Wolcott involuntarily. “Rod, dear, Jean was right; you must learn to distrust charm that is not founded on character. I want my elder son to be sensitive to a lack of honor and to shun the acquaintances whose standards are not high. Later you must rub shoulders with all sorts of men, but until you are strong enough to lead others, take care who leads you, Rodney dear.”

“He was a winner,” said Rod. And his mother knew that in this way he paid a sad tribute to a dead love and confidence.

“It is part of your education, Rod dear. I’m sorry; it’s hard to be disappointed. But try to make up to your loyal, fine sister for the anxiety you gave her, and the hurt your unkindness to her must have inflicted,” said Mrs. Wolcott, patting Rod’s hand so lovingly that her words did not sound like the blame they really conveyed. “I can think only of how thankful I am that the dear old house is to be the Wolcott house still. What narrow escapes from a saddened home-coming I have had!”

“Mother, I’m awfully sorry I’m the kind of chap I am!” said Rod, laying his head on that knee which had

held him in his babyhood. He was not ashamed of the tears he would never have let Jean see. "I wish I was the steady sort Steve is."

"I need my Rodney and I need my Stephen ; I don't want you alike, dear boy," said his mother. "But I want you to be the best kind of a Rodney, and I think you will because I want it !"

"As sure as guns I wouldn't want to make you sorry about me, mother," said Rod. "I guess the kind of man you want me to be is about the best kind I could be. Draw the design and cut me out by it, will you, mother ?"

"Indeed I will, dear son of my heart ! And together we'll make you a son after my own heart ! No boy can go far wrong who loves his mother truly," said Mrs. Wolcott, kissing the handsome, flushed face before her.

"Well, I'd like to know who wouldn't love such a mother as you are !" cried Rod. "I'm going to stick to you like beeswax, tell you all I'm about and get your idea of it. You're about the—the *motherest* mother a chap ever had ! Jean's all right, but by jiminy, I'm glad you're back !"

"So am I, Rod, oh, so am I !" his mother echoed him. "I have felt dismembered all this time. It is like being numb and feeling your heart pulling from far, far off, left behind you and drawing you to take it back

into your body, to be a mother far off from her children."

Mrs. Wolcott closed Rod's door behind her and softly opened Jean's. The white figure of the girl, clad for the night in its floating gown, lay on the cushions in the deep window-seat, as Jean gazed out to sea, thinking long thoughts. She was blissfully happy, deeply grateful for the mercies of that day, yet half deliciously afraid. For the future had lifted its veil to Jean that day and she saw, coming toward her, the solemn joy of womanhood.

She heard her mother's gentle touch on the knob of the door and instantly uncoiled herself and leaped to meet her.

"I knew you'd come, dearest!" said Jean, with a thrill in her voice that moved her mother to a vague wonder and fear. "You always have come to me last of all. I was waiting for you. I've been waiting for you all summer, at first so frightened! Then afraid to be a little less frightened, because you might not be better, in spite of seeming so! And, lately, so thankful to know you were coming, but so hungry for you! Oh, mother, do you think there could be anything in all the world could make me happy if I did not have you?"

"Yes, Jean, my treasure, yes! But nothing in all the world would quite fill my place. And sometimes, when

you were happiest, you would be stabbed with pain that I was not here to know about it. I loved my mother, too, and I want her still. . Often I want her to show my children to her, and especially my dear, dear daughter Jean, who has her name !” replied Jean’s mother.

For a moment the mother and daughter clung to each other, profoundly moved, loving each other, thankful, happy, tasting the past loneliness of separation, clinging to the proof that they were together.

“Come over to my window, mother mine,” said Jean, gently pulling her mother toward the cushions in the seaward window. Here she placed her mother comfortably and curled down beside her and her mother drew the skirt of her dress around the slender young shoulders in the white lawn gown.

“Has it been a very hard time, my Jean ?” asked Mrs. Wolcott stroking Jean’s hair.

“Yes, no, I don’t know,” said Jean. “It was hard, of course. I made such blunders and got so tired at first. And lately there have been bothers—I’ll tell you to-morrow ! But I liked to feel useful and I liked—myself ! I’ve been feeling myself grow taller and wider and deeper ; it’s a nice feeling !”

“You’ve been my comfort, my help, my reliance ; you’ve let me get well, Jean,” said her mother. And in that moment Jean had her reward.

When, a few moments later, Mrs. Wolcott bade Jean good-night, she murmured in the girl's ear: "The dearest girl in all this world is my daughter Jean!"

And Jean fell asleep with a grateful psalm of complete content chanting in her heart.

CHAPTER XX

JEAN'S FREIGHTED SHIPS

EARLY the next morning Hester Balfour, who had heard the great news, came up to meet and lose her heart to Mrs. Wolcott, the two things being one and simultaneous. Hester Balfour had missed her own mother too deeply not to respond to the motherliness of Jean's, while Mrs. Wolcott's heart went out to Miss Balfour quite as though she weren't a celebrity, but merely a lovable girl.

"I had a letter to-day, Jean," said Miss Balfour. "It came after a telegram; the telegram held the news. Mr. Carew wrote that he sent his warm greetings to all the Wolcott household, but, to his hostess, he says, he sends special greeting and begs her to hold him in her memory till he comes to Tidewater again—next Saturday."

"So long!" laughed Jean. "Impossible!"

"Try!" begged Hester Balfour. "Ah, but the telegram! That's the main thing, from your point of view—I liked the letter better! Mr. Stewart is willing to relinquish his plan to build at Tidewater, so now Mr.

Carew and I are going to lay our plan before 'you alls,' as they say down South. It is such a delightful plan!"

"Can't you lay it before mother and me now?" hinted Jean. "Saturday is on the other side of Friday, still. I'd like to know about it sooner."

Miss Balfour shook her head decidedly. "I won't skim off a drop of cream till Mr. Carew is here with his ladle, too. Saturday is only 'on the other side of' to-morrow, and I want you to get up tremendous curiosity as to what my mystery is about."

"It doesn't seem hard to guess as much as that, Miss Balfour," said Mrs. Wolcott. "The clew seems to be Mr. Stewart's giving up buying here, and therefore ——"

"No fair!" cried Miss Balfour, covering her ears. "Don't put two and two together; let them lie around separate till Mr. Carew comes!"

So Mr. Carew came, on Saturday, and the time between passed swiftly, for there was so much for Mrs. Wolcott to hear before she could be allowed to describe her life in the sanitorium, which she had to do in detail.

Miss Balfour and Mr. Carew were invited to tea in the old Wolcott house that night and came down the cliff together at the appointed hour, so happy that they

did not care who saw their bliss, which overflowed upon all around them. The Wolcotts were so happy themselves that they did not need sunshine from outside their home, but this pair came to increase it till the very walls of the fine old house seemed radiant.

After tea they all gathered, as was their custom, on the porch toward the sea. Jean delayed to give Winnie a helping hand with the many tea things, good, faithful Winnie who solemnly rejoiced with her employers in the return of the mistress of the house. She had paid the tribute of a sort of adoration to her from the moment Mrs. Wolcott had first greeted her with her gentle voice and luminous smile. The square little hand-maid—square in body and square in all her dealings—made many excuses during the day to steal a few moments in the room where Mrs. Wolcott happened to be. She rarely left it without upsetting that lady's gravity by her funny involved speeches. Now Winnie protested against Jean's absenting herself from her guests.

"Which is nowise necessary, contraiwise," she said, precisely like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. "It is my duty and my desire to do all this work to-night, Miss Jean, for which there is time as I have no other hope beyond except to bed, and for that at any time is enough time, since I am lucky enough to have my room

to myself and waken nobody whenever I come up by dropping shoes or the like. And had I ought else, what would it matter, since to serve you is my honor and my place and the greatest pleasure. For never have I known other ladies of any age or clime, England or in the States, nor yet in India, I make bold to declare, for there I have seen pictures in missionary reports of small children fed to crocodiles in the Gang River because they know not what they do, not having the light of Christianity shed upon them like that lighthouse which guides marringers home out yonder, never have I known two ladies which I could love and die for with greater enjoyment than for your angel mother and you, Miss Jean. So wiping my own dishes is far off from dying a martyr joyous at a steak, which always seemed to me a curious thing to bind one to, as the bone is not sufficient, but likely steaks in the hands of heathen empyroars is not like those where the English tongue is spoken. So return to your guests, Miss Jean, my well-beloved young lady, and leave the dishes to Winifred Thomas, which you may well do, since so much as a chip is my care to avoid and to my mind chips is more disfiguring to a plate than an open break, though to be sure it leaves the middle still able to cover milk in the cellar, or what not. Go, dear Miss Jean; I would rather not have you linger."

Jean ran away laughing and came out on the porch among the others, still laughing, perching herself on the left arm of her mother's chair, the right one being already secured by Dorcas.

"I was waiting for my hostess of the first visit," said Mr. Carew. "The girl that held this fine old house for her family must listen to my plan and have a vote on the decision to be made."

"Thank you," said Jean. "I am glad that you waited for me: I don't want to miss a word—we've been eaten up with curiosity."

"It is not a long story," Mr. Carew began. "Miss Balfour has friends—writers and painters—who are anxious to start a small colony on the Massachusetts coast. The idea has been discussed for some time: this summer Miss Balfour came here with the object of seeing whether Tidewater might prove to be the place for this colony, and whether, if it were, there was land to be had along the shore for their purpose. She had been trying four years ago to interest me in the idea, to the extent of helping it to get properly financed—not to join it, I regret to say! She hoped that I might be useful, because of my connection with Stewart, Reed & Company, but she had no idea—then!—of my being also ornamental if I were connected with her! The best of women are cruel: Miss Balfour treated me with

contumely, yet she did not scruple to try to make use of me !”

“ Oh, Alan, these nice people don’t want to hear your moan over past agonies !” cried Miss Balfour.

“ Well, then, to resume the cheerfuller theme,” said Mr. Carew. “ Miss Balfour was wondering whether any part of the old Wolcott place could be bought for the colony. There are ten people so far—married and not—who want to join the colony. There is Stanley Howard Leigh, the novelist ; David Aldemar, the poet ; Wilbur Hart, the portrait painter ; Alixe Gulden Deane, the flower painter ; Tom Bourse and his wife, who collaborate on those clever parlor plays and historical romances—so called because they romance about history till she is so mortified she disappears altogether ! There is Miss Balfour herself and four others who are climbing up into the glare of fame and are the pleasantest sort for neighbors, good fellows, every one of them, women as well as men. The idea is that ten houses are to be built for the ten double and single colonists, a house for the unmarried ones just as for the married ones—none of the houses to cost more than two thousand dollars, but each to be as pretty and individual as possible within that limit.”

Jean had been listening with parting lips and brightening eyes. “ And are you going to get all these de-

lightful people to come to Tidewater?" she cried, as Mr. Carew paused.

"That depends on two people," said Mr. Carew. "If Mr. Stewart had set his heart on starting a Land Improvement Company down here I should have felt that I couldn't act contrary to his desires. But Mr. Stewart has yielded his future interest in this place to me, so I can buy here without scruple—if I can buy! Now the question is: Will the Wolcotts care to sell any part of their land?"

"Should you want much land?" asked Mr. Wolcott.

"Ten acres, we thought," said Mr. Carew. "Our idea is to allow a half acre to a house. That is enough for a garden and a lawn with a chair and an easel or a table on it, so that the Colony Geniuses could work out-of-doors. Ten acres would do this and leave a few extra lots for recruits to the colony. Does the plan strike you favorably, Mr. Wolcott?"

"Decidedly," said Mr. Wolcott. "I have been wishing that I could reduce my land to about four acres, but I dreaded risking neighbors who would be the ordinary type of gay summer cottagers. I think we can arrange it, Mr. Carew, if you decide on Tidewater as the site of your colony."

"Mrs. Wolcott?" suggested Mr. Carew.

"It promises all sorts of delights. And—it would be

in every way good for us," said Mrs. Wolcott, not explaining what a twofold good it would be in reducing taxation and increasing revenues. "It would be the best thing that could happen for Jean."

Jean had been nervously twisting her fingers, her cheeks aflame as she saw a vision of poets and novelists and painters at her gates, through whom, if talent were really hers, the inspiration and guidance for her own longed-for career would inevitably come. She saw, above all, Miss Balfour, married to Mr. Carew, and close to her each summer.

"Oh," she burst forth in irrepressible rapture as Mr. Carew turned to her with a smile of invitation for her verdict. "It would be too good to be true! Just what I told you that I wanted that day when you took me to lunch in Boston! My home still in Tidewater, but surrounded with charming people! Oh, Mr. Carew, can you bring it about?"

"It is brought about now, if your father and mother will sell to us," laughed Mr. Carew.

"We will not refuse anything so much to our advantage," said Mrs. Wolcott.

Mr. Wolcott stirred uneasily. "When would the sale be effected?" he asked. "You see I counted on getting the first aeronaut who used my rudder to make his ascent from Wolcott land."

"Will it be ready soon, Mr. Wolcott?" asked Mr. Carew, determining that this ambition should be gratified, if possible.

"I can't tell positively, I really can't say precisely," said Mr. Wolcott. "But I think it would be safe to count on its completion within two years; I think I may safely say that the rudder will be ready to exhibit by that time."

"We shall have four acres left, Bentley: that will be enough to make the ascent from," said Mrs. Wolcott gently. "Perhaps, as Jean will be twenty in two years, and all these clever people will make such a great difference in her life, we would do well to help the colony's beginning as soon as may be."

"I wonder what else is going to happen that is nice!" cried Jean. "It seems as though the whole sky was shining with Wolcott rainbows, everything is so full of promise for us."

Roger came, whistling, in sight at that moment and Miss Balfour looked with a smile at Jean.

"Did you mean you saw a beau of promise, dearie?" she whispered.

"What do you think we're going to do, all ye Wolcotts and Wolcottettes?" called Roger as he swung around the corner. "My mother and Mr. Wolcott's stepmother, and Helen's mother, with Helen, are all

sitting on a pile of wraps and things down on the sand. And all of you here present are going to get a pile of wraps and things and we're going to embark. The *Maid of Orleans* is too small for us, and the *Nixie* is smaller yet—don't listen, Rod!—so I've got the noble schooner, *Molly Burke* of Portland, now in our port, Captain Gill, to take us voyaging. It's to celebrate Mrs. Wolcott's return and the engagement of Miss Balfour and Mr. Carew, and—all the big chunks of happiness we've been having broken off and handed out to us so liberally for the past few days. 'We won't come home till morning,' we set out not to! The moon is in her last and smallest hours, rises about half-past eleven, but she lights up all right when she gets around. We're going to have a moonlight chowder—or else a fish chowder, if you feel like anything more solid—on board at midnight, and we're coming back when the little blue jays and catbirds are screaming their matins."

"Roger, of all mad plans!" cried Mrs. Wolcott.

"But a settled plan, dear lady," said Roger with a profound bow.

Dorcas was careering around like a top, her boasted lack of mischief not apparent. "I'm going! I'm going! I'm going, too! To stay up all night and sail and sail!" she shrieked.

"Sounds like Captain Kidd, instead of the Wolcott kid," suggested Rod. "It won't hurt her, mother, for once."

"What fun it will be!" cried Miss Balfour, really delighted.

"You don't say anything, Jean: don't you like the idea?" asked Roger.

"I love it!" cried Jean, leaving no doubt of her sincerity. "But I was wondering—Roger, would nice, compact Winnie be in the way? She has no girl friends here and she would enjoy it so, if only to adore mother in the moonlight! She will not put herself forward."

"Bless you, Jeannie, I don't care whether she is forward or astern!" said Roger heartily. "Of course the good little bunch may come! What a nice girl you are, Jean dear, to think of your handmaid and reward her for her devotion."

"That isn't nice. Winnie is young, though it doesn't show often, and I'd hate to be away from my own people, among strangers as she is," said Jean, hurrying away from the warmth in Roger's eyes, with a blush and a perturbation that was not unpleasant.

Mrs. Wolcott arose to follow every one else into the house; there had been a general stampede to prepare when her family saw that Mrs. Wolcott was not going to object to Roger's exciting project.

“Just a minute, Jean’s dear mother,” said Roger softly, laying a hand on her arm. “I want to be fair. I’m older than Jean by three years and she is particularly simple, unconscious for seventeen. She is stirring in her sleep, though! The day Dorcas and I were in danger”—Roger did not say “the day I rescued Dorcas”—“Jean began to suspect she cared for me, not in the old way that had been a development of her little school days. It is only a sort of dawn in her, but I want to be fair. May I go on trying to make her care for me the way such a girl as Jean can care for a man?”

Mrs. Wolcott halted with her hand on the casement of the doorway of the old house. “Roger, it is hard for a mother to realize time! It seems so lately that I went to see my friend, Anna Cathcart’s, new little son! I wasn’t married then. And about the space of a breath ago I took my own baby in my arms and named her for my beloved mother! You are a fine boy, Roger, an honorable man. I could ask nothing better for little Jean than to love you; I have hoped she would. But—don’t hurry her, Roger! Let her halt on the edge of girlhood as long as she can. Try, dear, to hold back your desire. Jean will feel it surely enough and grow up too soon. Let my little girl be a little girl just as long as she can—please, Roger.”

"I'll help her keep her girlhood ; I promise," said Roger, kissing Mrs. Wolcott, whom he had loved all his life. "As long as there's no danger of any one else cutting in, I won't bother Jean."

"Thank you, Roger. I'm perfectly sure no one else will ever take your place to Jean," said Mrs. Wolcott, going on her way. Tears were in her eyes, but she was smiling. "He means every word," she thought, "every word ! But nobody ever can hold back spring blossoming. My little Jean will be my grown up daughter and betrothed before she is much older in years. Bless my little poet, my true, loyal, loving little woman-child !" And Jean's mother went slowly onward, up-stairs, still smiling with her lips yet drying her eyes as she mounted.

"Now we're off !" shouted Rod ecstatically, as the schooner, *Molly Burke*, began to get her pace and stand off toward the lighthouse. Her pace was not a bad one ; she had a good deal of speed in her useful frame and she was as clean as any yacht.

Captain Gill was taciturn, but sympathetic ; he did everything that he could do for his passengers' comfort, but conversed with them solely by the use of "yes" and "no." He was much younger than one's pre-conception of a sea captain would have made one guess. As the night went on, and the chowder appeared and

disappeared, and the tardy moon arose to make this adventurous celebration perfect, the *Molly Burke's* passengers discovered, with boundless amusement, that Winnie's flow of remarkable language had a fascination for the *Molly's* captain. He arranged a comfortable seat for the chubby Welsh maiden and listened to her eloquence with a wondering admiration that made Mr. Carew prophesy that "Portland" would be painted out on the *Molly Burke's* stern and "Tidewater" be substituted for it.

Dorcas, to her intense disgust, found herself growing sleepy as they sailed toward home at two o'clock in the morning. She had so resolutely determined to keep awake all night for the first time in her short life! But the shortness of that life interfered with her carrying out her resolution. Little Dorcas fought hard, but could not hold her eyes open. She fell sound asleep after several partial droppings-off and Steve pillowed her head upon his knees for the rest of that voyage.

The homeward sail was too beautiful, too full of mystery in those small hours to allow much talk. Not even singing occurred to any one. Deep and far the stars shone over the mysterious ocean, till the moonlight dimmed them. All save Venus, shining in the east with rivaling glory, till the first changing, tremulous color of dawn showed around her.

-

It was a wonderful sail, a marvelous night. Roger had been inspired to give his friends this rare pleasure, they all agreed.

Jean half lay, half sat with her head close to her mother's, her mother's hand in hers. She could not bear yet to be where she could not touch this dear mother, to assure herself that she had her still and was to keep her.

"Sleepy, little Jean?" asked Mrs. Wolcott, speaking softly into the delicate ear that was hidden in her neck.

"No," said Jean, shaking her head till her ruffled hair tickled her mother's lips. "Thinking. And being happy, deep down, perfectly happy."

"Thinking of how you are to write beautiful stories and poems and of how dear to me is my daughter Jean?" asked Mrs. Wolcott.

Jean nestled closer by way of marking her appreciation of her mother's words. "That, too," she said. "I'm going to write; I know it, but somehow I don't think of it first of all, as I used to."

"Then what is first?" Mrs. Wolcott whispered. "What were your long, deep thoughts about, Jean dear?"

"About how blessed I am, of what a kind, kind year this has been to me! Of all my freighted ships, freighted with future years and joys and sorrows, sail-

ing toward me from beyond the seas we know," said Jean, the poet.

Her mother tightened her hold upon the girl's hand. Jean's eyes met Roger's as he smiled at her from his distant place.

Jean smiled back at him trustfully, but she turned to her mother with a childish movement and snuggled her head deeper into her shoulder.

"All my beautiful, gloriously freighted ships," she repeated. "But, oh, mother darling, nothing can ever be better than to be your daughter Jean!"

By Amy E. Blanchard
War of the Revolution Series

The books comprising this series have become well known among the girls and are alike chosen by readers themselves, by parents and by teachers on account of their value from the historical standpoint, their purity of style and their interest in general.

A Girl of '76

ABOUT COLONIAL BOSTON. 331 pp.

It is one of the best stories of old Boston and its vicinity which has ever been written. Its value as real history and as an incentive to further study can hardly be overestimated.

A Revolutionary Maid

A STORY OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD IN THE
WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE. 312 pp.

No better material could be found for a story than the New Jersey campaign, the Battle of Germantown, and the winter at Valley Forge. Miss Blanchard has made the most of a large opportunity and produced a happy companion volume to "A Girl of '76."

A Daughter of Freedom

A STORY OF THE LATTER PERIOD OF THE
WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE. 312 pp.

In this story the South supplies the scenery, and good use is made of the familiar fact that a family often was divided in its allegiance. It is romantic but not sensational, well-written and rich in entertainment.

War of 1812 Series

This period is divided into two historical volumes for girls, the one upon the early portion describing the causes, etc., of the war, the latter showing the strife along the Northern border.

A Heroine of 1812

A MARYLAND ROMANCE. 335 pp.

This Maryland romance is of the author's best; strong in historical accuracy and intimate knowledge of the locality. Its characters are of marked individuality, and there are no dull or weak spots in the story.

A Loyal Lass.

A STORY OF THE NIAGARA CAMPAIGN OF
1814. 319 pp.

This volume shows the intense feeling that existed all along the border line between the United States and Canada, and as was the case in our Civil War even divided families fought on opposite sides during this contest. It is a sweet and wholesome romance.

EACH VOLUME FULLY ILLUSTRATED. Price, \$1.50

W. A. WILDE COMPANY, - - Boston and Chicago

BOOKS BY

Ellen Douglas Deland

Malvern; A Neighborhood Story

341 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

"Malvern" is a story of fine workmanship, sterling sentiments, and more than ordinary caliber. The author is one of the best writers for young people, and this is certainly one of her best stories.—*The Interior*.

A Successful Venture

340 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

This book, primarily for girls, is lively and full of interest, pure in its tone and free from sensation, and full of many helpful suggestions. It is a story of a family of girls who found it necessary to make their own way in the world. This they did with success.—*Boston Transcript*.

Katrina

340 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

"Katrina" is a story which all girl readers would pronounce a capital good one. The heroine's desire to look beyond the horizon of her little village when opportunity presents itself takes her to New York, where she finds new pleasures and experiences. The book is certainly a most wholesome one.—*The Bookseller*, New York.

Three Girls of Hazelmere. A Story

360 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

To take a trip abroad with Miss Deland's "Three Girls of Hazelmere" is a treat for any reader, for the author's style is natural, yet remarkably effective, and the interest follows closely to the end of the book.—*Bookseller*.

The Friendship of Anne

342 pp. Cloth. 12mo.

This is a book which will appeal to girls and interest them throughout. It is founded on boarding-school life and is full of activity and enthusiasm.—*Herald and Presbyterian*.

Each Volume Fully Illustrated. Price \$1.50 Each.

FAMOUS STORIES FOR GIRLS

By Charlotte M. Vaile

The Orcutt Girls

OR, ONE TERM AT THE ACADEMY. 316 pp.

Sue Orcutt

A SEQUEL TO "THE ORCUTT GIRLS." 335 pp.

These companion volumes are among the most popular books for girls which have ever been written concerning school life. In these books Mrs. Vaile depicts that old academic life which used to be so great a feature in the life of New England. Mrs. Vaile shows her intimate knowledge of the subject, and both books are full of incentive and inspiration.

Wheat and Huckleberries

OR, DR. NORTHMORE'S DAUGHTERS. 336 pp.

Another story for girls with the true ring of genuineness, and as the two girls around whom the story centers were born and brought up in the rich farm regions of the Middle West, and then spent their summers in the New England home of their grandfather, the author has been able to weave into her narrative the various peculiarities of both sections.

Each volume is fully illustrated. Price, \$1.50

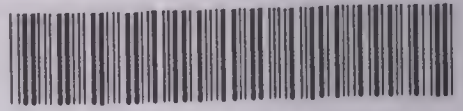
The M. M. C.

A STORY OF THE GREAT ROCKIES. 232 pp.

The experience of a New England girl in the Colorado mining camp. It shows the pluck of the little school teacher in holding for her friend a promising mining claim which he had secured after years of misfortune in other ventures.

Fully illustrated. Price, \$1.00

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0002563259A